

# (Re)producing everyday life: urban commoning through care





# CONTESTI

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Rivista di Urbanistica e  
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# (Re)producing everyday life: urban commoning through care

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## keywords

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## The rationale behind the theme

This issue of *Contesti* (no. 1/2024) explores the complex interconnections between everyday life, commoning, and care, drawing on epistemological approaches that highlight the dynamic and non-static nature of urban space. It emphasizes how the political, social, and cultural conditions in urban contexts often lead to the fragmentation of the urban fabric, increased commodification, and the reinforcement of power structures, which in turn exacerbate social inequalities and advance individualism (Viderman et al., 2023). Against these fragmenting tendencies, and with a focus on everyday life—where lived experiences and material practices merge—this issue suggests that commons can act as the glue that binds urban spaces together. By engaging with the politics of the commons, which are “perpetually made and remade, created, eroded and defended” (Chatterton, 2010: 626), the production of urban fabric is revealed as an everyday negotiation across a wide range of differences, aimed at fostering harmony in shared space and time. The commons illustrate how societies strive for cohesion and seek to address and overcome conflicts, mobilizing both individual and collective resources in everyday life. In connecting commons with care, this is-

sue specifically examines how locally embedded caring practices—those that create and sustain collective relationships fostering mutual support and solidarity—disrupt established power dynamics, reclaim urban space, and reappropriate everyday life in opposition to structural forces that fragment society (Gabauer et al., 2022). This perspective positions care as a shared social practice, rather than an individualized responsibility, making it a fundamental element of the politics of the commons (cf. Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

The thematic framework of this issue builds on the research and insights shared during the international conference “Urban Conflicts and Peace: Everyday Politics of Commons” (5-6 October 2023, Naples, Italy), of the AESOP Thematic Group “Public Spaces and Urban Cultures”, organized by the National Research Council of Italy, Institute for Research on Innovation and Services for Development (CNR-IRISS), and hosted by the University Federico II, Department of Architecture and the Lido Pola Urban Common.

### **How everyday life, commons and care relate**

Capitalism produces urban spaces through expansion, commodification, and resource exploitation. The drive for centralized accumulation and competition at its core results in uneven development, fostering inequalities while destabilizing the very foundations on which capitalism relies, such as social repro-

duction, nature, and social cohesion. Shaped by capitalist growth and regulation, urban spaces become sites of contested relationships, and time is experienced through accelerated rhythms and routines (Viderman et al., 2023). Henri Lefebvre (2014 [1946]) proposes that everyday life is the quintessential site for understanding the material and social dimensions of urban development. According to him, systemic conditions and power relations are embedded in everyday life, which, in turn, serves as the foundation upon which social relations are reproduced, contested, and reimagined. Everyday life is both affective and transformative—bodies are not simply affected by external conditions but act as interfaces between private worlds and urban environments, transforming passions into actions (Hardt, 2007, drawing reference to the work of Curley (1986) on Spinoza). This makes everyday life a site of both capitalist alienation and potential resistance. It is impacted by systemic forces like commodification of space and time, as well as power structures that affect people’s ability to experience urban spaces as shared places of belonging and care. At the same time, everyday life nurtures opportunities for resistance, allowing people to challenge systemic forces, enact radical transformations, and reclaim space and time (Viderman et al., 2023). Everyday life is simultaneously a site of struggle and potential transformation. It is permeated with asymmetrical, complex, and contested relationships, which are indicative of and inter-

twined with challenges of political representation, ecological and economic crises, social and cultural exclusion, as well as discriminatory access to healthcare, education, social services, and resources. Yet, it also channels hopes, needs, and desires for collectively negotiated social orders (ibid.). The examination of care practices offers insights into how capitalism extracts value from everyday life through the commodification and reconfiguration of social reproduction and its spatial expressions (Fraser, 2022). Value generation and extraction occur through a hierarchical division in which production is tied to capitalist, patriarchal society, while reproduction is associated with care activities mainly undertaken by women (Patel and Moore, 2017; Rossi, 2022). Nancy Fraser (2022: 53) emphasizes that capitalism is also a “guzzler of care,” suggesting that it not only commodifies caring practices by transforming them into a marketable commodity but also individualizes and invisibilizes the struggles associated with caregiving. By doing so, capitalism exploits caring relations and undermines the collective dimensions of care that are fundamental for building social bonds, thereby eroding communal forms of life. The result is widespread social exhaustion and time poverty—conditions that stem from the systemic pressures of the capitalist mode of social reproduction. She expands: “The fact is, our social system is sapping energies needed to tend to families, maintain households, sustain communities, nourish

friendships, build political networks, and forge solidarities. Often referred to as carework, these activities are indispensable to society: they replenish human beings, both daily and generationally, while also maintaining social bonds. In capitalist societies, moreover, they assure the supply of commodified labor power from which capital sucks surplus value. Without this work of social reproduction, as I shall call it, there could be no production or profit or capital; no economy or culture or state”. (Fraser 2022: 53)

Due to commodification processes, care is increasingly atomized and individualized under capitalism. It has shifted from being a collective responsibility to a highly individualized burden, often relegated to the private sphere and primarily undertaken by women (Patel and Moore, 2017). This privatization of care not only turns care into a market commodity but also isolates the responsibilities of caregiving, disconnecting it from its communal nature. Feminist thinkers have emphasized the political, economic, social, and urban importance of care, as it lies at the heart of the reproduction of life (Federici, 2004; Held, 2005; Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Tronto, 2020; Cavallero and Gago, 2021; Gabauer et al., 2022; Miraftab, 2024). Despite being commodified and disrupted by systemic forces, care remains integral to sustaining communal bonds and supporting individuals as they face uncertainties and pressures in urban environments. It offers a foundation for creating collective spaces of solidarity and resistance against the frag-



mentation of everyday life brought on by capitalist dynamics. Fraser (2022: 152) argues that a collaborative mindset can counteract “capitalism’s tendency to institute zero-sum games, which take away from nature, public power, and social reproduction what they give to production”. Therefore, care should be understood as a shared responsibility supported by collective infrastructures and common actions.

The concept of ‘commons’ has become broadly accepted across various fields and public debates as a term to describe the appropriation of collective space and action that promotes interdependencies between collective modes of care and individual well-being. Commons, in a narrow sense, are collectively cultivated and shared resources, but the concept expands to include a wide range of material and imagined practices that challenge the commodification trends imposed by capitalist urban development. These practices aim to benefit society as a whole. In this understanding, commons and care are mutually intertwined in urban contexts, as urban commons, in their multiple configurations, embrace forces and practices that pursue novel forms of just and inclusive society (Chatterton, 2010; Belingardi, 2015; Bianchi, 2018; Sato and Soto Alarcón, 2019; Ragozino et al., 2022; Vittoria et al., 2023; Sciarelli, 2024). As Silvia Federici (2012) argues, referencing the commons is not just symbolic but also a call to raise awareness of the inaccessibility of territorial and urban resources except through monetary arrange-

ments of the free market. It highlights new forms of social cooperation and the importance of placing care at the center of domestic and political life. In such a context, commoning describes actions or struggles that promote overall well-being, such as inclusive access to infrastructures and social networks, as well as public resources such as water, clean air or education. It fosters care as a form of mutual support and collective inclusive shaping of everyday life.

A broader understanding of the concept of commons allows for a nuanced view of contemporary urban space and time, as regards the desired dimensions of sociability, difference, and collective living. This approach moves beyond seeing action and institutions as binaries, instead examining their interrelation to understand the daily dynamics of how people negotiate their relationships with urban environments and each other. Urban commons express the entanglements among spaces, communities, and governance models, and recognize the ways in which institutions adapt to social demands. In this regard, institutions and other structures of power position themselves as responsible for delivering provisions aimed at fostering the common good (see for example EU’s strategic document “New Leipzig Charter- The transformative power of cities for the common good”). Although framing the commons as resources managed by the State might imply a flawed hierarchical perspective, it underscores the recognition of importance of commons in

shaping collective well-being across Europe. At the same time, a critical perspective emphasizes the daily struggles of individuals and groups engaging in commoning, thereby driving social and spatial transformation.

A critical perspective links urban commoning closely to grassroots practices of social and socio-ecological reproduction. While social movements cultivate emancipatory potential in response to capitalism's exploitative framework, caring practices to answer basic human needs nurture a collective political subject that acts in a shared effort (Fraser, 2022). The Care Collective (Chatzidakis et al., 2020) defines commons as 'infrastructure of care' through which social bonds are established and strengthened. These collective practices not only encompass the 'affective labour' of social reproduction but are also representative of broader resistance towards subjects' emancipation and space appropriation (Tanyildiz et al., 2021). Urban commoning is thus an action that seeks to reconfigure dominant power relations and redistribution patterns, and mitigate the adverse spatial impacts of capitalist-driven appropriation and associated environmental degradation. It is an inherent part of everyday life, manifesting not only in large-scale actions but also in the daily negotiations that individuals and groups undertake to reshape social, cultural, and material aspects of their living environments, ultimately fostering 'social reproduction and resistance in the city' (Boler et al. 2014).

## **Essays and Research**

Building on the themes of urban commoning and care explored in relation to urban space, the articles collected in this issue of *Contesti* provide plural perspectives on the challenges and opportunities for (re)producing everyday life in urban contexts. They draw on a range of perspectives, fields of interest and backgrounds to examine how social reproduction, urban commons, and care infrastructures shape our cities and address contemporary social issues.

This issue is structured around three interconnected themes: (1) the production and everyday politics of urban commons, (2) care as a social activity and public responsibility, and (3) enabling strategies to enhance urban resistance. These themes, though distinct, often overlap in practice, research and policy, demonstrating the interdependence between commoning, caring, and everyday life in urban environments.

## **Production and everyday politics of urban commons**

The first set of articles focuses on the creation and management of urban commons, the values generated through commoning, and the role of (agro)ecologies in territorial regeneration. These articles engage with discussions inspired by Elinor Ostrom's (1990) theories on common pool resource management, which emphasize the effectiveness of appropriate self-governance and collective agreements. This perspective stands in contrast to Garrett Hardin's (1968)

concept of the ‘tragedy of the commons,’ pointing to an inevitable overexploitation and depletion of shared resources as individuals act in their own self-interest. By reporting and reflecting on recent experiences of commoning, the articles in this section illustrate how urban commons can serve as experimental grounds for fostering new forms of getting together, and creating collective values and visions.

The contribution by Pappalardo and Saija poses key questions about who is responsible for public spaces and who, in practice, actually cares for them. Their case study, set in a public park on the northern outskirts of Catania, Italy, offers a critical perspective on commoning processes and reflects on the “collective effort to take care of a neglected space”. By bringing to the forefront commoning as a “process through which individuals ‘get organised’ for the purpose of protecting, caring, enhancing, and mobilising around the actual status and/or future prospects of a certain space of shared interest,” the case is analyzed through the combination of Argyris’ theory of organizational learning and Esposito’s concept of ‘instituting thought’ applied to urban planning. This instituting-organizational approach allows for the conceptualization of organizational models, ways of accessing resources, and the relationships between formal and informal dynamics.

Lanteri, Montanaro, Spinelli and Vassallo conducted an empirical study of the ‘failed’ project La Place des Possibles in Saint-Laurent-en-Roy-

ans, Drôme (France), which involved the Collectif Etc. They reflect on the dialectical relationship between the designer and the space throughout the commoning processes, drawing insights from the concept of designing for care. The project, which began in 2017 with the goal of transforming a former factory into a care-oriented space through a self-organized construction process, highlights challenges and opportunities of such initiatives. The unique approach to producing spaces and creating places typical of commoning pushed the designers beyond their comfort zone, prompting the question: What role does space play as a medium of negotiation within a collective process that unfolds in slow and uncertain ways?

Oubad’s analysis of the failures and struggles of commoning practices that often do not stand the test of time underscores that the production of commons is not always a peaceful process. Through embedded activist-ethnography, Oubad reflects on the dynamics of exclusion and solidarity within the complex dynamics of squatting in Brussels, identifying a recurring pattern: the ‘(re)production and negotiation of mobile commons’. By actively engaging with squatters’ collectives and undocumented individuals in Brussels, the author presents a threefold case study demonstrating that squatting serves not only as a space “for commons (re)production but also platforms for migrants’ and activists’ social becoming”. These commoning experiences, extending beyond their primary

function as shelters, emerge as “dynamic spaces where negotiation and social transformation occur, conventional humanitarian assistance models.” The study thus explores the impact of urban commons in creating alternative dwelling infrastructures for undocumented migrants and their impact on the everyday urban politics of solidarity.

### **Care as a social activity and public responsibility**

The concept of care, which intersects multiple topics, is rooted in discussions within the feminist approach to addressing the everyday challenges of social reproduction (Cavallero, Gago, 2021; Graham, 1991). Under the broad framework of care in the city, of the city, and for the city and the territory (Gabauer et al., 2022), a rich debate has emerged, underscoring the need for care infrastructures and policies that are inspired by a caring approach.

Antonucci, Demurtas and Proia approach the topic of urban commons as an expression of community needs and a means of providing non-institutionalized social services. They examine anti-violence centers in Italy from a feminist perspective, with a particular focus on the Lucha y Siesta practice in Rome. Lucha y Siesta defines itself as a feminist and transfeminist urban common where anti-violence is a collective activity which engages the community through cultural and political initiatives, using an innovative methodology to support women on their

journey to self-determination against domestic violence. The authors, therefore, demonstrate the generative potential of urban commons, specifically in terms of care and gender dynamics. The relational hubs that emerge from urban commons initiatives offer the opportunity to experiment with innovative care experiences “of women for women” outside of, and in parallel with, traditional institutional care infrastructures. By focusing on anti-violence centers as a framework for women, the authors emphasize the need to treat these centers as social places and recognize them as commons. The significance of this contribution also lies in its positioning within the ongoing debate regarding the institutionalization of spontaneous, successful commoning initiatives, which have emerged to address gaps in social services.

The interplay between commons and public responsibility in territorial regeneration and environmental awareness lies in the focus of Caruso’s article, which describes the long process of adopting a River Contract for the Ombrone River (Tuscany, Italy). Using a five-year action-research approach, the author captured the potential of engaging with schools to understand territorial needs. Beyond adults, children were actively involved in the process, providing unexpected insights into the co-design experience. This extended mutual learning process empowered the children, giving them the role of active agents in shaping and caring for the territory. Recognizing children as producers, not merely

users, of public spaces could be applied in community-led regeneration projects, thus enhancing collaborative design initiatives.

Considering that public institutions also have a responsibility to regulate economic initiatives, political disputes regarding the public realm in port regions and special economic zones (SEZs) frequently result in decisions which affect communities' everyday life. Di Ruocco and D'Auria discuss how SEZs are often on the brink of becoming sites of conflict or, under specific rules, could be transformed into commons that benefit the community. However, the establishment of SEZs frequently exacerbates spatial injustice and land-use conflicts when stakeholders prioritize corporate interests over those of the community. The cooperative assessment approach proposed in this article emphasizes the evaluation of local needs, resources, and investment goals to ensure they are suitable for the region and benefit both local communities and global investors.

### **Enabling strategies to enhance urban resistance**

Urban movements dedicated to resisting and counteracting the current mainstream economic model—still predominantly characterized by a linear production-consumption approach despite attempts to shift towards circularity—are actively addressing the impacts of care and ecological crises on everyday life through various strategies. These strategies are grounded in

the politics of relationships and the networks of mutualism and care that emerge from collective action (Kern, 2022; Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Boller et al., 2014).

From this perspective, Perreault studies the production of commons through two practices in Montreal, examining how these practices can generate positive side effects for people not directly involved. Drawing on the three forms of social capital theorized by Putnam (2000), the author focuses on the 'ricochet effect', through which commons can transform cities into caring cities. Collective action, whether positively or negatively perceived by those not directly involved, influences the social environment surrounding the community, thereby affecting the practice itself and the recruitment of new activists. Furthermore, the ricochet effect can stimulate the creation of new grassroots initiatives and commons. The central role of cities within Canadian federalism offers the possibility to explore an open governance model guided by the ethics of sharing and commoning, in which the benefits of commoning practices can converge in local enabling strategies.

Places play a crucial role in the commoning experience, as they can either facilitate or hinder interactions among various people or support various functions for both human and non-human actors. Iannizzotto, Paio and Perrone direct their attention to urban spaces that are in flux or not yet assigned a specific use, making them more open to transformative possibilities.

These 'empty spaces' are significant for grass-roots and informal urban modifications, as they present opportunities for new uses. The authors propose a shift in the conception of empty places from 'Terrain Vague' to 'Vague Farm,' suggesting that when these spaces, characterized by temporary availability, are utilized by different communities spontaneously and informally, they become fertile grounds for transformation. By observing community gardens in five European cities, the authors develop a theoretical framework for community-enabling strategies in dilapidated interstitial urban spaces, incorporating sustainable land-use practices.

While an abandoned patch of inner-city land might readily offer the opportunity for creative reuse, the coastal areas of a densely populated city face economic interests and social and environmental challenges. In Italy, access to the seaside is often regulated with a preference for commercial uses rather than prioritizing citizens' 'right to the sea'. Pica's case study of the Neapolitan coast reveals the potential of grass-roots movements to reclaim seaside access and involve a broader population in resisting urban extractivism. Referring to Ostrom's theories on the ability of organized communities to effectively manage common pool resources, the article presents the case of Donn'Anna Beach in Naples, which was opened to the public due to the mobilization by the Comitato Mare Libero, Gratuito e Pulito. This case is framed within the broader national debate on the management

of beaches, with the author suggesting that a model similar to the Collective and Civic Uses adopted by the Municipality of Naples could be applied nationally to regulate public access to the seaside.

### **Outlook and reflection**

The contributions collected in this issue of *Contesti* underscore the pervasiveness of collective care action in urban environments, where the issues of urban degeneration are becoming increasingly urgent and concerning for the quality of life of communities. They show that the conceptualization of commoning through care is applicable both at the theoretical and practical levels, widening its scope and impact, and maturing into new fields of research, novel approaches, alliances, levels of awareness, and habits in the use and production of public space. The collected works also encourage new ways of doing research, emphasizing cross-pollination and mutual learning between researchers and activists, thereby subverting traditional scholarly observation and theorising. We hope that these contributions will inspire scholars, activists, and practitioners engaged in the complex and ever-evolving fields of commoning and caring practices.

To deepen this reflection, a significant reading has been included in this issue—Walter Benjamin and Asja Lăcis's groundbreaking essay on Naples, originally published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* on 25 August 1925. This essay, which

employs the concept of porosity in describing everyday life in Naples, is significant not only for its impact on how the city was perceived but also for establishing a new conceptual framework centred on porosity. Since Benjamin and Lācis first used the term nearly a century ago to describe what they saw as the defining aspects of Neapolitan life, numerous scholars have adopted it to explore Naples, Italian culture as a whole, the analysis of other cities, and the dynamics and complexities of urban living more broadly. This organic expression has been considered the origin of the definition of models of 'liquid modernity', which addresses the perceived impacts of economic globalisation on society.

The concept of porosity, both successful and controversial, was developed to encapsulate the multifaceted nature of Naples and has since become a topos extended to the understanding of cultural stratifications and layered everyday life. In a few pages written with the aim of moving beyond the traditional 'Baedeker approach' to traveling, the metaphor of porosity has been an essential interpretive tool in exploring the cultural expressions of Naples—ranging from noble palaces and chapels to cinematic representations of the interaction between interior and exterior spaces. Despite the risk of reinforcing stereotypes about the Neapolitan way of life, the vibrant narrative by Benjamin and Lācis has transcended its original context, inspiring effective fieldwork on public spaces and everyday urban life far beyond the southern Italian city.

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# An instituting-organisational framework for the interpretation of urban commoning. Lessons from a neighbourhood park

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## Introduction

What makes a neighbourhood public park a well-maintained, vibrant, and inclusive space, where a variety of people – especially those who are less likely to have access to quality domestic space – can spend time, socialise, feel comfortable, and safe? Who's responsible for planting, cleaning, and taking care of it? Should all these activities be the exclusive 'maintenance' responsibility of public actors or should park users be directly engaged in caring for it?

Planning literature provides a variety of answers to these questions, none of which appear to be definite. Many studies on urban commoning – i.e., processes that sees various actors

organising and caring over a space perceived as an urban common – provide arguments in support of the functional, pedagogical, or political significance of engaging people in the act of caring for a public space. At the same time, these arguments are counteracted by many studies showing the downsides of commoning, such as public institutional withdrawal

*Drawing from critical scholarship on commoning processes, this article discusses the disciplinary relevance of a commoning case that took place in a neighbourhood park on the northern outskirts of the city of Catania in Italy. Based on our direct engagement in the process, we tell the story of its rise and fall with the aim of reflecting on the possibilities and the pitfalls associated with a collective effort to take care of a neglected public space.*

*The case is presented for its argumentative value and is discussed through the lens of a theoretical framework developed intersecting Argyris's theory of organisational learning and Esposito's 'instituting thought'. The purpose is to argue the centrality of two important dimensions of a commoning process, organizational consistency and inclusivity.*

from spatial welfare, privatisation, creation of self-elected governing enclaves, etc.

As a matter of fact, the issue of who's responsible for a public park takes the planning scholarly debate into the hearth of a much larger political debate on the premises of our democratic system and the actual legitimacy of the role of Public Institutions as embedded in the 1948 Italian Constitutional law. What is the reason behind the desire for the direct involvement of park users in its governance and caring? Do we want to question institutions' ability and or legitimacy to do that? On the contrary, do we want to consider commoning as an occasion to strengthen public institutions, and, if so, what are the conditions that would support it? This article addresses these questions proposing a theoretical framework that we call 'instituting-organisational', developed at the nexus between Esposito's instituting thought (2020; 2021) applied to

urban planning (Li Destri and Saija, 2023) and collective learning theories, especially Argyris' work on organisational learning (Argyris and Schön, 1978; Argyris, 1995).

The instituting-organisational framework is used to discuss the case of a public neighbourhood park called 'Parco degli Ulivi' (Olive Trees Park, OT Park from now on), located in the northern outskirts of the City of Catania, Italy. Here, a dozen residents and representatives of local organisations, including the two authors, have organised under the label of 'Collaborative for the Olive Trees' (OT Collaborative, from now on) and hosted events inside the park for roughly one year in 2023. Despite the good premises and goodwill, this collective effort aimed at caring for the park has encountered a number of pitfalls. This paper proposes a reflection on the obstacles faced by the OT collaborative using them as food for thought for the planning scholarly community concerned with commons and commoning processes. The purpose is to encourage scholars to dig into the very nature of such processes, in search for those elements that matter the most if these processes ought to be truly emancipatory and inclusive; if they

also ought to not undermine but, on the contrary, keep public institutions accountable, while standing the challenge of time.

The paper is structured as follows. After introducing the instituting-organisational framework (section 2) and the context (section 3), we clarify our methodological approach (section 4) and present and discuss the case, focusing on the motivations and obstacles faced by the local organisations and individuals involved (sections 5 and 6). In conclusion, we focus on two characteristics (organizational consistency and inclusivity) that we think can add some elements to the debate on commoning processes.

### **Intersecting organisational and instituting theories in the urban commons' testbed**

It is hard to find a planner that is openly against public parks – i.e., public spaces with permeable land, trees, bushes, playgrounds, benches, etc. – in residential neighbourhoods. In Italy, since the 60s, they have been mandatory, as national planning laws (L.765/1967 and DM 1444/68; see Baioni et al., 2021) list them as 'planning standards,' i.e., spatial infrastructures for socialisation and recreation of urban residents that have to be guaranteed by urban plans. Contemporary planners have even more reasons to plan for parks, which are praised for their ability to also provide important ecological services beyond socialisation, playing a key role in the challenging game of making cities more resilient to climate change.

However, a closer look at the reality of many medium-sized Italian cities may reveal that both social and ecological advantages of parks should not be taken for granted; certainly not in the contemporary era, in the face of an increasing contraction of the public welfare state, corresponding to a decrease of the institutional will or abilities to manage many of the urban public parks inherited by neighbourhoods as 'planning standards'.

As a matter of fact, many public parks, especially those owned by relatively 'poor' municipalities (mid-sized, depopulating, etc.) and located in struggling residential areas (low-income neighbourhoods, public housing complexes, etc.), are often spaces of abandonment, pollution, crime, and fear (Sreetheran and Van Den Bosch, 2014). On the contrary, for those parks located inside or in the proximity of 'hot' real estate areas, the risk is to see privatisation and development taking over trees and bushes (Grazzini and Bordin, 2024).

In the context of an increasing influence of neo-liberal dynamics on cities, there is an increasing scholarly attention on the issues of governance of public spaces like public parks. This has been recognized even by urban design scholars warning about the fact that public actors often have to rely on partnerships with non-public actors while retreating from their direct responsibility over spatial welfare (Carmona, 2015). Spatial governance is exactly the focus of the broad literature on commons that does not necessarily

focus on public parks but it could be useful to summarize in the following paragraph.

Hardin's seminal work on the tragedy of the commons (1968) focuses on mechanisms for managing common-pool resources which are subjected to the so called 'prisoner's dilemma,' i.e., the fact that individual users often act in their own self-interest, choosing to betray each other, leading to a worse outcome for both than if they had cooperated. According to Olson (1965), the prisoner's dilemma can be overcome within small groups of users with strong ties, using incentives and without coercion. Weimann et al. (2019) have proved that this also apply to larger groups while Graham et al (2019) have studied the characteristics of the different incentives (tangible rewards, but also social recognition or psychological mechanisms) that encourage collective action (Graham et al., 2019). Others have focused on alternative governance arrangements (Holahan and Lubell, 2022) and the collective learning mechanisms behind them (Kim et al., 2020). Nobel laureate Elinor Ostrom (1990) provides a major contribution to such a debate, arguing that collective action for the virtuous management of common-pool resources is possible through the establishment of arrangements for shared governance.

From the perspective of this article, Ostrom's argument can be interpreted as there can be a third way between:

- the social-democratic idea of the exclusive responsibility of public actors over the man-

agement of resources and spaces – like public parks – for the collective interest;

- the liberal idea that the invisible hand of the private market will, at the end of the day, provide what is needed by society, even parks.

As a matter of fact, Ostrom shows the possibility that individuals who care for a common can 'gather', converge, collaborate, and organise with the purpose of its management, eventually establishing formal collaborations with either public or private actors. Ostrom has inspired a very large body of literature on the governance of the commons over the past three decades, which has evolved by shifting attention from the actual nature of the managing arrangement and of the spatial object to be managed (the common) toward the nature of the actual process leading to such an arrangement (the commoning process; De Angelis, 2017). Studies have also begun to see commoning as the expression of social movements reacting to neoliberal dynamics (Dardot and Laval, 2014 Stavrides, 2019; Varvarousis, 2020). The focus on processes also allows an acknowledgment of often conflicting nature of commoning processes that are related to social mobilisation (Viderman et al, 2023). Along these lines, others argue the importance of interpreting commoning as a political struggle rather than a search for a technical solution for spatial management (Velicu & García-López, 2018) and, in general, to be aware of the power dynamics they imply (Partelow et al, 2023). Recent literature has looked at such a political na-

ture within the framework of 'caring,' stressing the significance of commons as infrastructures of care, i.e., places where relations of interdependence emerge and can be nurtured through the act of caring about something with others (Caffentzis and Federici, 2014; Barbagallo et al., 2019; Care Collective, 2020).

Ostrom's studies have also inspired planning scholars to interpret urban public spaces – including parks – as commons managed by forms of shared governance (Micciarelli, 2014; Ciaffi, 2019; Vittoria et al., 2023). In particular, literature on parks seen as urban commons (Mitrašinić and Mehta, 2021) includes a great variety of cases. People can get together either to fight against threats over the beloved park (Tedesco, 2023) or to contrast abandonment and dismay with events, volunteer work, clean-ups, resident-led gardening, etc. (Arvanitidis and Papa- giannitsis, 2020).

Despite the interesting and hopeful cases documented by scholars, a close look at the literature makes clear that commoning is not necessarily a recipe for success.

Many have led attention toward the risks associated with commoning, such as the retreat of institutions from their political responsibilities (Vitale, 2013), increasing privatisation of public goods, or, more generally, the use of 'agreements with the civics' as a way for decision-makers to cover up social conflicts (Quintana and Campbell, 2019). In addition to that, commoning processes often encounter the risk

of becoming social enclosures where 'a self-selected few' end up managing and deciding over something supposed to be for the benefit of all (Jeffrey et al. 2012). Finally, on the basis of the work of Mady and Chettiparamb (2017), one could argue that public institutions might still be the starting point in contexts characterized by long-standing deep divisions within civil society. This paper aims at advancing such a debate on urban commoning – i.e., a process through which individuals 'get organised' for the purpose of protecting, caring, enhancing, mobilising around the actual status and/or future prospects of a urban common – through the introduction of a specific theoretical framework where the verb 'getting organised' refers to the following two facts:

- Individuals, who care for or have an interest in an urban common and voluntarily adhere to a collective (Olson, 1965; Weimann et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2019; Holahan and Lubell, 2022) become an 'organization' when the collective assumes a common name and a shared mission that is usually formalized into public documents and narratives. Argyris and Schön (1978) call these documents 'organizational maps', stressing their being a point of reference in the way individuals perceive the organization (what Argyris calls individual cognitive maps).
- Individuals, on the basis of their own understanding of the organisation's purpose – which depends on their theory-in-use [i.e.,



“the theory that individuals espouse and that comprises their beliefs, attitudes, and values” (Argyris, 1995, p.20)] – contribute to collective actions, i.e., actions carried out not by individuals in an independent fashion, but rather collaboratively by a meaningful number of members of the collective; these actions are supposedly conceived so that their pursued goals comply with the collective’s shared mission.

According to Argyris, one of the main challenges faced by collaboratives and organisations is the frequent mismatch between organisational and individual cognitive maps, especially in a process of organisational learning and change (in which such maps evolve, at both the organisational and the individual levels). As a matter of fact, documents and narratives are never as clear and exhaustive as hoped for and there is always a gap of understanding, a distance of perspectives amongst members, which end up becoming divisive in the long run. For these reasons, organisational learning experts suggest that organisational learning occurs when such a mismatch is minimised, making sure that each member has a profound understanding of what keeps people together despite inevitable individual differences.

Things become even more complicated, in the cases of an ‘organising’ process aimed at the caring for a public space, especially if the process gives birth to a ‘brand new’ collective aiming at playing an intermediary role between the indi-

vidual experience of spatial users and the public institutional actor who owns and supposedly manages it. In this case, borrowing Esposito’s (2020; 2021) terminology as applied to planning theory by Li Destri Nicosia and Saija (2023), the challenge for the collective is to be ‘instituting’: this term refers to a temporary, but not short-lived, civic organisation that is a collective political actor emerging from the convergence and the reciprocal recognition of the individual experiences. A civic organisation is an ‘instituting’ one if it constantly links the level of the law with the one of individual experience, enlarging the circle of inclusivity. It is like to say that a commoning process is desirable if it generates a form of civic organisation whose purpose is constantly related to the points of convergence in the people’s perception of problems and the opportunities in the portion of geography they somehow ‘inhabit’ and care for.

According to our instituting-organisational framework, a desirable commoning process should then have the following two characteristics:

- Alignment between the evolving scope of the organisation embedded into the organisational map and individual cognitive maps and theory-in-use (Argyris).
- The evolving scope of the organisation remains representative of the individual instances, maximises individuals’ inclusion, and has an impact on existing public institutions and the level of the law (Esposito).



## A view of the Olive Tree (OT) Park

Source: Authors' archive, 2023

Fig. 1

It is against these characteristics that, in the following paragraphs, we'll test a case of a coming process related to an urban park.

### The context

The OT Park (3,8 ha; Fig.1) is located at the heart of the Catania 4° District, called "San Giovanni Galermo-Trappeto-Cibali", that extends for about 736 ha hosting roughly 40.000 residents (ISTAT). The Park was planned as part of the 1969 Comprehensive Regulatory Plan of the City of Catania, characterized by a central concern over the provision for minimum quantities of square metres of public spaces (standards) for public services forerunner of the 1968 National Decree Law. In particular, the Catania Plan provided for the creation of a new park system across the various city districts. However, such an early stage of planning did not imply a rap-

id implementation, since the OT park was designed and implemented only many years later, between 1997 and 2001, thanks to a project funded by European Regional Development Funds 2000-2006. Funds covered the expropriation of 3 hectares of rural land south of the Trappeto Public Housing complex as well as the landscaping and the construction of pedestrian paths, fountains, lighting, benches, and a playground. In the final design, several elements of the pre-existing agricultural system such as rural terraces and irrigation channels were integrated into the park landscape.

Even before its official opening, in 2001, the local newspaper reported neglect, vandalism, waste dumping, drug dealing, and fires (La Sicilia, 15.07.1999, p. 20), a deficient road system (La Sicilia, 06.10.2000, p. 22), and explicit concerns by residents.

The other night, I walked with a friend of mine into the new San Nullo Park on Via Santa Rosa da Lima. We were both amazed by the size of the garden and sadly disconsolate, given the poor state the park is in. Numerous lampposts are already broken, numerous beer bottles shattered [...] And construction works have not yet been completed! In what state do you think the park will be handed over to the citizens at this rate? (La Sicilia, 23.10.2001, p.17; translated by the authors).

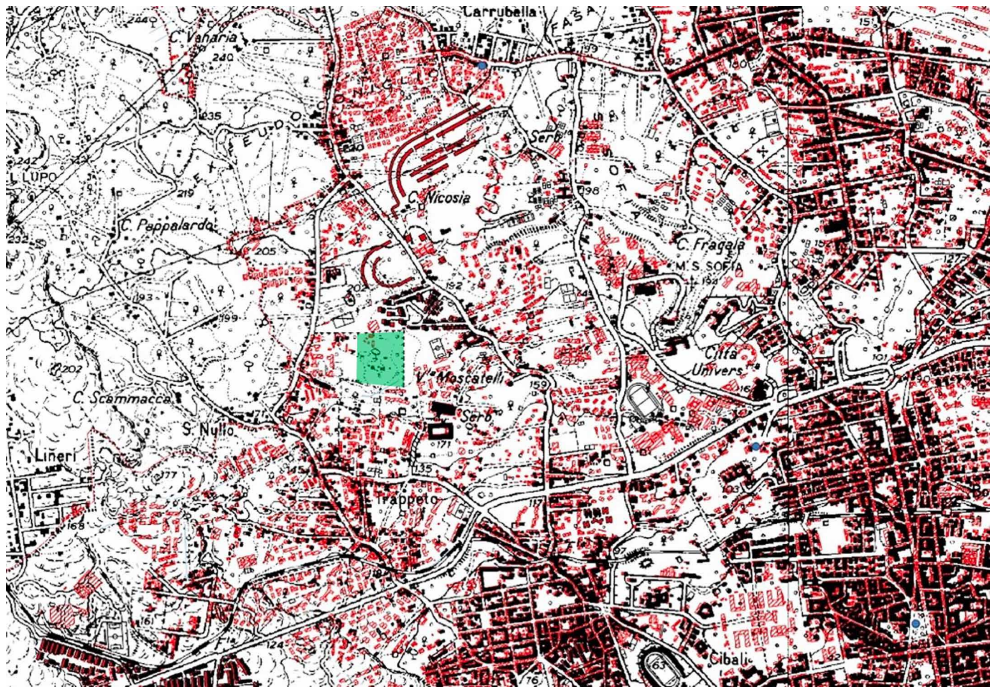
In the following years, the same newspaper talked about on the lack of maintenance for the OT park together with other green spaces in the city (La Sicilia, 30.08.2002, p. 20).

As a matter of fact, the OT park was created with the best of intention but did not open its gates to be the kind of social infrastructure envisioned by the plan. The reasons behind this are probably related to the physical and social character of the urbanisation it was meant to serve. At the end of WWII, the area north of the park was still largely rural, with the exception of a small public housing neighbourhood funded by the INA CASA program. South of the park, urbanisation was limited to the San Nullo and the south Trappeto villages, made of buildings along the two historic roads, Via Sebastiano Catania and Via San Nullo, running from the city centre to the top of the Etna volcano. Both in the northern and southern areas, urbanisation intensified during the post-war era (see Fig. 2), together with important public investments, following two very different mechanisms. First, in the San Nullo, south Trappeto area, private developments, and housing coops were

accompanied by the establishments of the first city services: a primary school was opened in 1957 (now relocated), the first city bus line arrived in 1964, and the local parish was established in 1966 (Chiarenza, 2018).

Second, the northern rural area, on the contrary, was developed thanks to the approval and implementation of the 1973 Piano di Zona Trappeto Nord, i.e., a plan for a public housing neighbourhood called North Trappeto providing for the construction of public houses and neighbourhood services for about 17.000 low-income residents.

Despite the good intentions behind the Plan, the social history of the North Trappeto complex follows the same tale of neglect, abandonment, and social distress of many public housing complexes all around Italy. This one, in particular, has acquired the reputation of being an area under criminal control as well as amongst the main drug dealing squares of the city (La Sicilia, 17.03.2023, online). As a matter of fact, San Nullo/South Trappeto and North Trappeto are not one but two 'neighbourhoods' (Fig. 3), where roughly 13.000 residents live today in an area of 210 ha, and where different urbanisation mechanisms have led to very different socio-demographics (low-income in North Trappeto and middle- to high-income in San Nullo). It should not come as a surprise, then, that a public park built between these two communities has not become a place for peaceful socialisation but 'nobody's land'.



**The historical map of the area (IGM, 1960, in black) overlaid with the 2012 topography map (in red). In plain red, public housing buildings. In green, the area where the OT Park is today**

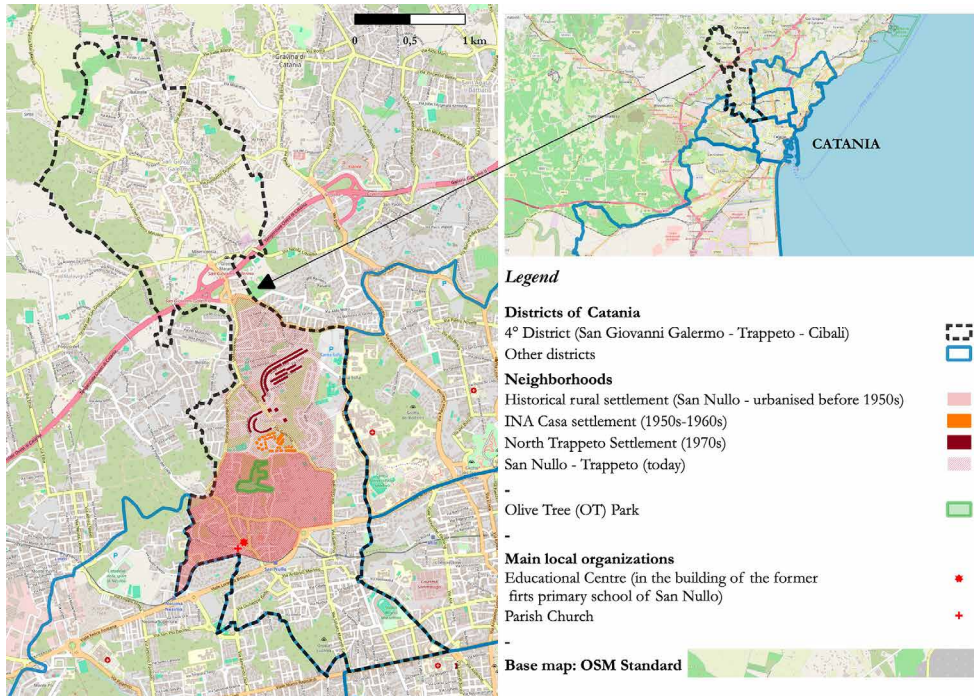
Source: Authors' elaboration based on IGM and regional data

Fig. 2

### **Methodological clarifications and premises**

In the following paragraphs, we tell the story of a commoning process related to the OT Park. Such a story is told for the purpose of arguing the relevance of the instituting-organisational framework presented in section 2. The case has been developed combining two different research approaches. On the one hand, is based on a case study methodology (Yin, 2009) conducted through archival research (the analysis of historical documents and the press), geodatasets' analysis, participant observation, interviews. On the other hand, it is also based

on the action research (AR) approach applied to urban planning (Saija, 2016), since we have been directly involved as engaged scholars in the course of most of the narrated events. The story is then a combination of analysis of data we have collected after the fact and of critical self-reflection over the very facts we have intentionally contributed to, as action-researchers. The story for us begun with an invitation to join a meeting, on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023, with representatives of neighbourhood organisations committed to the 'enhancement' of the OT Park. The invitation came from the head of a local NGO



## District and OT Park Vicinity Maps

Source: Authors' elaboration based on geodataset and OpenStreetMap  
 Fig. 3

running an after-school educational centre located in the former primary school building in the San Nullo village (the educational centre, from now on). Reasons for that invitation were rooted in the long-term collaboration between our research lab at the University of Catania and the educational centre. Between 2015 and 2017, Giusy Pappalardo (GP) was a co-instructor of two service-learning classes involving planning students, local kids, and their parents in the design and implementation of a resident-led community garden in the outdoors of the educational centre headquarters (Piazza et

al., 2018). By the end of this collaboration, participants had shared the general idea that community gardening could have been a good idea also for the neglected OT Park, located less than a km north of the educational centre. This idea arose, again, when Laura Saija (LS) proposed to the educational centre a collaboration with her 2021 Land use planning class working on a plan for the neighbourhood. During this collaboration, in particular, a dozen residents showed an interest in having community gardens located inside the boundary of the OT Park, based on the same mechanism the City of Catania had



## A picture of the activities at the Spring Festival

Source: Authors' archive, 2023

Fig. 4

applied in other neighbourhoods: the request was to convert abandoned portions of permeable public land into a series of gardens, each of one to be entrusted to a single household interested in growing food for private consumption only (Saija et al., 2024).

Based on these previous experiences, we welcomed the invitation to work with local organisations in pursuing the enhancement of the park. Our own motivations were:

- pushing for the implementation of what we had previously perceived as a residents' need, i.e., the enhancement of a neglected public park through a community gardens project (LS);
- developing further engaged research activities on the neighbourhood, with a specific focus on the role of collective oral history and mapping in a resident-led urban regeneration process like the upcoming OT Park process (GP).
- In addition to this, the leader of the educational centre asked for methodological sup-

port, based on her knowledge of our past experiences in process facilitation (Saija and Pappalardo, 2022). Therefore, we agreed to join the group by playing a methodological advising role to whoever would have taken up the role of group coordinator.

### **Story, part I: from a group to an organisation (Argyris)**

We joined the OT group for the March meeting, with representatives of the local Parish Church, the local catholic Scouts group, colleagues from the University of Catania, and 5 different non-profit associations including the educational centre, a local housing cooperative, and the local chapters of a renowned anti-mafia organisation and one large environmental NGO. We discovered that, based on previous individual conversations, participants had already decided to organise a first public event in the park which was eventually named Spring Festival, and the agenda for our meeting was dedicated to event-planning.

Specifically, the Spring Festival, held on March 26<sup>th</sup>, was a whole day at the park with games, music, activities for families, etc. Each Organisation focused on activities in line with what Argyris calls its own 'organisational routine': the educational centre organised plays and activities for its kids; scouts carried out hands-on outdoor activities; anti-mafia activists led a anti-mafia celebration, with kids' reading out loud the names of mafia victims; University researchers gave speeches on the park, each one related to his/her own expertise. We served on the basis of our 'participatory' expertise at the sign-in table, collecting contact info of participants (see Fig. 4). Twenty new residents showed an interest in being engaged in the process (mostly, parents interested in improving the park for spending time with their children, residents interested in sports, outdoor activities, and environmental education, and some teachers). The event was documented on social media, receiving a lot of likes and comments. It was also reported by the local newspaper as a successful commoning initiative (La Sicilia, 27.3.2023, VI).

The Spring Festival represented an important step in the OT process not only because it was the first open call for attention from a small group of committed citizens to the large public, but also because it set the tone of a highly collaborative relationship between the group and the local Administration. Despite the fact that several activists and participants had blamed

the City for pitfalls in park maintenance, surveillance, and design, the group chose to organise the Festival under the banner of the Presidency of the Catania City Council. It helped the fact that the newly appointed City Council President (the CC President, from now on) was an influential long-term San Nullo resident, parishioner, and politician, who proved to be very efficient in approving the mandatory formal requests for the use of public soil as well as authorising the use of public equipment for the event, including chairs and the stage for the speeches. As was later revealed, however, the involvement of the CC President in the process created some imbalances in the power dynamics within the group, since he facilitated the relations with the City but not without attempting to control such relations.

The first group meeting after the festival focused on self-evaluation and planning for further steps. The overall perception of the event was very positive, to such an extent that all participants seemed interested in future activities replicating the same format. All but us. Asked to provide methodological advice on how to move forward with the process, we found ourselves lacking crucial and necessary information: having missed the initial individual conversations and in the absence of any written document or even a common name for the group, we were not sure about the group's shared purpose. Here, we felt the importance of mobilising Argyris' lessons as a way of helping the group to

Who	Excerpts of authors' ethnographic notes showing different premises and motivation of the individuals involved in the commoning process	Proposed activities reflecting the different <i>theories-in-use</i> mobilized by the different individual actors
The leader of the Educational Centre	"Offering another space for the children, the mothers and the fathers that attend the centre that we run, to experiment with practical healthy activities, positive relations, community ties in the Park"	Activities with children and parents that use to be engaged in the NGO's work, to be conducted also at the Park (outdoor learning, summer camps, gardening, hands-on activities).
The chief-scout	"Taking care of a place as a way to take care of a small portion of the Earth: a symbolic act"	Hands-on activities with the group of boys and girls scouts (building street furniture, clean up).
The priest	"Promoting the neighbourhood and a sense of belonging through the activities done in the Park"	Worship activities (e.g., Via Crucis), catechism groups; religious events.
Resident 1	"Having a safe, open air, green space where I can spend meaningful time with my wife and my child, close to my home"	Other festivals, hands-on activities, clean-up, bricolage, workshops, sport training, gardening.
Resident 2	"Making the Park flourish again through practical collaboration among people who want to commit themselves to the same goal"	
Resident 3 (also, member of an association of environmental guides)	"Showing how beautiful and unique the Park is from a geological and botanical standpoint. This neighbourhood, San Nullo, is a historical settlement that deserves to be valued for its history"	Organization of guided tours inside the Park and in the surroundings. Request of expanding the boundaries of the Park, environmental protection and cultural valorisation.
Resident of another District of Catania, walk leader for the program "1 km of health2, promoted by the Local Health Authority	"Walking in this Park, like in other Parks in Catania, to promote a healthy lifestyle and practices of active ageing"	Walks with elderly, sport training; organisation of other festivals, hands-on activities, clean-up.
CC President	"Doing something for San Nullo, not necessarily at the Park"	Creating ties with the City Council and the administrators.
University researchers, beyond the authors	"Doing something for the territory where the University operates"	Codesign activities of the playground, landscaping of the Park, branding of the Coalition, such as the logo, the social media, etc. (architecture researchers);
	"Showing the uniqueness of the geomorphological features of the Park"	Walks to discover the rocks and the plants of the Park (geology researchers + floriculturist researchers).
	"Showing the uniqueness of the arboreal species, the Mediterranean scrub, and the living beings that inhabit the Park, more than humans"	
The authors (engaged-researchers)	"We would like to use the opportunity of the Park as way to engage directly with residents to empower them"	Door-knocking, gardening and collective memory maps as vehicles of engagement.



# A summary of some individuals' motivations and proposed actions that derive from different theories-in-use

Source: authors' ethnographic notes

Tab. 1

'get organised'. What we were witnessing was not a problem of group size or of lack of incentives – as Olson would suggest. Rather, it was a problem of clearly identifying the commonalities among individuals. We had heard about the need to 'do something for the park', but our perception was that 'something' meant different things for different people. Using Argyris' terminology, the group was not an organisation yet, in the sense that it did not have a clear and shared organisational map to be used in order to verify the alignment between participants' motivations as well as the collective future course of action. We shared that observation with the group, and everybody agreed on having an internal workshop aimed at clarifying the relationship between individual motivations (individual cognitive maps and theories-in-use) and the shared purpose, to be used for the choice of a name and the development of a shared 'road map' (organisational map) for the following 8-9 months. The workshop, which consisted of 2 meetings between April and May 2023, allowed participants to become aware of the inevitable differences between individual motivations (explained in detail in Tab. 1) but also their convergence toward the park.

The main outcome of the workshop was participants' shared idea that the transformation of OT Park from a neglected and dangerous space into a vibrant, safe community space was not a goal in itself but rather a means to advance: kids' education for the staff of the education-

al centre; cohesion amongst parishioners for Church representatives; environmental education and research for environmental scholars and activists. We declared our interest as planners, to see the 'regeneration' of the Park as an occasion to empower local residents, especially the most distressed inhabitants of the North Trappeto Public Housing complex, as a strategy toward their direct mobilisation and organization for the enhancement of the neighbourhood.

The workshop resulted in:

- a new name for the group – the OT collaborative – and a logo, as well as social media pages and a shared contact list;
- a written document with a shared purpose and a road map of 'public events in the park'. The road map was conceived as an incremental process of practical initiatives to be carried out in the park, combining various activities – e.g., outdoor activities for the elderly, programs for kids, participatory urban design and oral history – aimed at the production of: residents' increasing presence in the park and in the OT collaborative meetings; the finalisation of a DIY project for the construction of an improved playground for kids; a new final design for the park, including a new site for resident-led gardens, to be submitted for the approval by the local Administration by January 2024;
- a slight increase in the number of residents participating in the groups' meetings. Participation increased from 1 resident in the first

meeting after the Spring festival to an average of 5 in the subsequent meetings before the Summer Festival.

### **Story part II: pitfalls of the commoning process through Esposito's lens**

Thanks to the alignment of the organisational map with the individual cognitive maps and theories-in-use, the group hosting the Spring Festival had become an organisation. However, its steering group was still made mostly not by residents but by representatives of pre-existing organisations – the church, the educational center, the scouts, the University, etc.. During the April-May workshop, we had explicitly asked to comment on the role of local residents in the process, with everybody pointing out the necessity of having a larger engagement of residents not only as 'participants' but as part of the decision-making process. This goal, which is at the roots of what Esposito defines as "instituting organisations", was a shared one, but has faced significant challenges.

This became clear after the Spring Festival, when the OT Collaborative decided to host a Summer Festival, on June 30<sup>th</sup>. Together with the replication of most of the activities already proposed in the Spring, the event hosted:

- a walk in the park with residents potentially interested in community gardening as well as an gardens' expert from City Hall; the purpose was to collectively discuss the potential location of gardens inside the park as well as

the bureaucratic steps to follow to have the City supporting the project. The walk was also meant as a strategy to increase the number of residents participating in the process. It was prepared through a meeting organised in the educational centre with about 30 residents who had shown an interest in gardening in the 2021 participatory process;

- a participatory exercise combining oral history and mapping to foster residents' engagement in thinking about historic values embedded in the park and the neighbourhood, as a first step toward collective thinking about the future.

Both these activities (Fig. 5) led to important and somehow unexpected outcomes, that can be considered critical is we apply Esposito's lens, related to decreasing inclusivity and representativeness.

The mapping exercise raised a lot of enthusiasm but revealed more than just people's perceptions of historic assets in the local built environment. While no residents from North Trappeto participated in the activity, many San Nullo long-term residents expressed their feeling 'the native' compared with their public housing 'neighbours,' as expressed by an elder: "We have always been here in San Nullo, we are not like them". They also expressed an overall mistrust in North Trappeto's residents' social habits and ability to care for a common space (in the words of younger San Nullo resident "they're not like us, they're different from us, we don't need to



## A picture of the Summer Festival

Authors' archive, 2023

Fig. 5

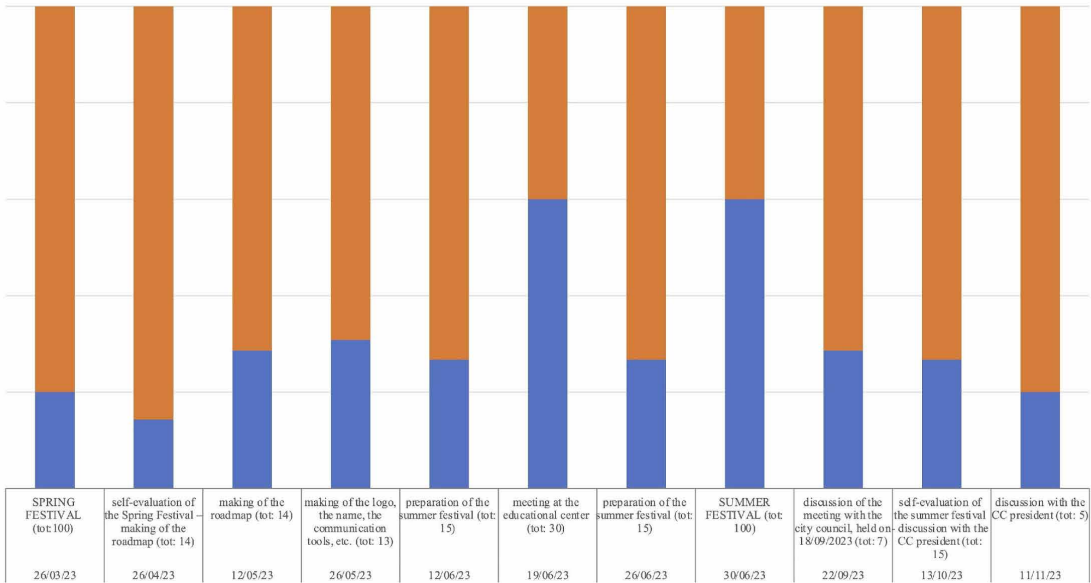
engage them to take care of the park”).

Despite the conversations about inclusivity which had occurred during the development of the roadmap (organizational map), the participatory exercise taking place during the 2023 Summer Fest showed many OT collaborative members' reluctance in engaging the North Trappeto residents, perceived as 'different' and unnecessary for the purpose of 'taking care of the park'.

In addition, the walk aimed to discuss the community gardens' project had a very low turn-out of residents, since only 2 showed up, none of

whom from North Trappeto, while attracting significant attention from local administrators. As such, after the festival (Sept 18th, 2023), the OT Collaborative was asked by the Office of the Mayor to join the city's periodic meeting with civic organisations interested in environmental stewardship. The meeting with the Mayor and city officials revealed the administrators' desire to increase the number of public green areas officially entrusted to civic organizations willing to care for them, as part of a broader strategy to address their lack of resources for park maintenance. This prospect became, then, the focus

ratio between residents and other participants during meetings/public events



**A graph showing the ratio between the number of residents involved (blue) and other participants (orange) during the different meetings and public events (festivals). The number of total participants per meeting/event is given in brackets**

Source: Authors' elaboration based on meeting reports  
Fig. 6

of the October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023 meeting, which proved to be a debate on the possibility of converting the OT Collaborative into an NGO able to apply for the formal 'adoption' of the park. The most enthusiastic voice about this possibility was the CC President, who talked for about 3 / 4 of the meeting time, assuring his full support to the initiative.

On that occasion, we, the authors, had the opportunity to only say a few sentences, warning about the enormous 'cons' vs. very few 'pros' of this prospect. In particular, we explained that the original idea of community gardens re-

lied on the adoption of small portions of public land by individual households, while the overall enhancement of the park was conceived as the outcome of a collaboration between residents and administrators, who had to remain in charge of maintenance and surveillance. We did not have the time to share our concern about the decrease of participation of neighbourhood residents in the OT collaborative meetings (see Fig. 6).

A following attempt to discuss these matters forward, during a November 2023 meeting, failed due to the lack of participation (just the

two of us together with the CC President, the priest and the two scouts' chieftains). No other attempts to meet have been successful by the time this paper has been completed.

Toward the end of this process, we've had the opportunity to only share our critical observations – both about the lack of inclusivity toward North Trappeto residents and the power imbalances related to the behaviour of the CC President – though face-to-face conversations with individual members of the OT collaborative.

We would have welcomed the opportunity to continue this work, also based on the observation that one year is not enough for deep collective learning around some of the ambitious goals we had on the plate. However, we have just registered an overall lack of commitment by former activists for reasons that we have tried to understand and comment in the final section.

### **Concluding remarks**

The story of the OT Collaborative reflects most of what scholars have said about urban commoning in the literature. The state of perennial neglect of a public neighbourhood park in the northern outskirts of the city of Catania is an issue affecting many public parks and spaces all around Italy and beyond (Sreetheran and Van Den Bosch, 2014; Carmona, 2015; Arvanitidis and Papagiannitsis, 2020; Mitrašinović and Mehta, 2021). It talks about the crisis of the role of our public institutions (Vitale, 2013) embedded in many social-democratic European constitu-

tions, i.e., lacking the resources and/or the political will to be guardians of urban commons for the benefit of all. The urge of civil society to organise against such a state of neglect recalls a widespread phenomenon that scholars have labelled as 'commoning'; (De Angelis, 2017; Dardot and Laval, 2014 Stavrides, 2019; Varvarousis, 2020) whose positive aspects – people's genuine urge to volunteer in caring for an urban common, in collaboration with others (Caffentzis and Federici, 2014; Barbagallo et al., 2019; Care Collective, 2020) – can all be found in the first phase of the OT Collaborative experience. However, the rapid fall of such a process can easily be connected with most of the critiques raised by the scholarly literature on urban commons. In its brief lifespan it risked – more or less wittingly – to exclude the most distressed urban residents (Jeffrey et al. 2012) as well as to buy into the ongoing 'adopt a park' campaign by the City of Catania, which hides an intentional withdrawal from management responsibilities over the public park system (Quintana and Campbell, 2019; Partelow et al. 2023).

According to the presented 'instituting-organisational' framework (Argyris and Schön, 1978; Argyris, 1995; Esposito, 2020; 2021; Li Destri Nicosia and Saija, 2023), we have argued that a commoning process should be evaluated also on the basis of people's ability to give birth to an instituting organisation, i.e., an organisation characterised by an evolving scope – as it is embedded into organisational maps – that

is kept aligned with individual maps and theories-in-use (organizational consistency) and is able to pursue collective actions that are not only representative of individual instances but also, and most importantly, enlarge the circle of inclusivity.

We have shown that this case can help advance our discussion on whether or not certain strategies or tools can support these processes in being and remaining overtime both inclusive and consistent. As participants in the process, we have raised those issues of inclusivity and organizational consistency since the aftermath of the Spring Festival, finding out that all commoners were ready to acknowledge their importance and acted consequently. Organizational consistency (Argyris) was addressed through the open acknowledgement of mutual differences and convergences as well as the development of a written roadmap. Inclusivity (Esposito) was pursued – even if not fully addressed – through specific efforts to engage more residents in the steering group meetings and in public events.

What made these strategies limited? We have witnessed that here ‘organisational’ matters had a much larger role than individuals’ motivation and incentives, as in the literature following Olson’s (1965) legacy. Keeping the contact list and the organisational structures up-to-date, writing and sharing the meetings’ minutes, distributing flyers, managing social media pages, and writing and submitting formal requests

to the City for events and activities are only a few of the key tasks that guarantee the organisation’s both inclusivity and consistency. They all require a ‘relatively’ significant amount of attention, time, and expertise, which ‘relatively’ refers to the amount that can be provided by residents of a distressed neighbourhood or staff of very busy and understaffed NGOs. From what we have observed, issues of consistency and inclusivity are not intrinsic problems of a spontaneous civic organisation but more a consequence of the organisational fragility of such an organisation.

Esposito presents, as former examples of instituting organisations, XX-century mass political parties or workers’ unions: not exactly cases of ‘spontaneous’ and volunteer-based committees or collaboratives, but rather highly structured organisations with an expert staff committed to specific tasks aimed at both consistency and inclusivity. Although the literature on commons has shown other possibilities beyond such structures, we think that the question of organisational capacity remains open.

In the OT Collaborative, individual motivations were aligned with the common goal of ‘caring for a public space, with others’ (Care Collective, 2020). This is necessary, but not sufficient, to sustain work done without staff or resources other than individuals’ volunteered time. Should this mean that we should take into consideration the possibility that, at least nowadays, spontaneous commoning is mostly, with

rare exceptions, intrinsically too fragile? We believe that a serious answer to such a question should imply a targeted line of research on the subject: one that focuses more on the dimension of maintaining the internal consistency of organisations (Argyris) with the need to widen the circle of inclusivity, while being able to have an impact on public institutions – making them more accountable – and the normative dimension (Esposito).

Assuming that the challenges are always going to be along the lines of organisational consistency and inclusivity, are there any strategies, tools, types of expertise that planners, or others, can put in place to support commoning processes from an instituting-organisational perspective? In sum, our interpretation of our own story generates an explicit plea for the scholarly community to consider a line of research aimed at explicitly addressing, both theoretically and empirically, this question as an urgent and important matter.

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# I centri antiviolenza come pratica di urban commoning

## Riflessioni ed esperienze nel contesto italiano e romano

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### Introduzione

Gli *urban commons*, intesi come spazi comuni riservati allo sviluppo di una sfera pubblica cittadina, azionabile anche per l'erogazione di attività e servizi prodotti dal basso, hanno trovato una stagione di grande sviluppo nel corso degli ultimi dieci anni nel contesto italiano, grazie anche allo sviluppo di sistemi di codificazione per la produzione di beni, spazi e servizi collettivi, non commodificabili, rivolti alla comunità cittadina, con il suo sistema di richieste e fabbisogni. Per molti aspetti questo *framework* ha conferito nuovo spazio all'idea di diritto alla città, creando luoghi, fisici e sociali, in cui servizi innovativi di gestione di spazi, di cura delle relazioni, di

condivisione di attività, di dibattito pubblico sulla città sono emersi in alternativa a modelli e servizi istituzionalizzati. Il presente contributo si propone di avviare una riflessione sulla fecondità dell'intersezione tra questa visione e l'esperienza dei centri antiviolenza (CAV) in Italia, a partire dall'analisi del caso di Lucha y Siesta che si qualifica come bene comune urbano relazionale di

*The aim of this paper is to reflect on the theme of urban commons and, in particular, to propose an interpretation of the experience of Italian anti-violence centres in this context. The first part of the paper is dedicated to the theoretical contextualisation of the urban commons. A second part reconstructs the emergence of anti-violence centres in Italy and their evolution over time. The third part is dedicated to the Roman experience of the Lucha y Siesta*

*House, which explicitly declares itself to be a common good managed and shared. In the background and in the conclusions, the tension between the specific identity of the Cav and Women's Houses and the relationship with the institutions remains, also taking into account the two models of shared management used in our country to care for and manage common goods.*

genere e che rivendica, al contempo, un approccio femminista e transfemminista.

Nella prima sezione si intende mettere in luce la natura degli *urban commons*, nella prospettiva di evidenziare l'emersione di progettualità autonome, innovative e rispondenti alla lettura di necessità territoriali e relazionali, che si pongono in maniera alternativa rispetto ai formati di risposte e servizi istituzionali prodotti nel sistema delle politiche urbane. Ciò anche allo scopo di introdurre un gruppo specifico di beni comuni, che si caratterizzano contemporaneamente per la loro natura relazionale e di genere e per la loro capacità trasformativa. Nella seconda sezione si descrive l'esperienza dei CAV, intesi come *hub* relazionali di cura delle donne e per le donne e, al contempo, come spazi politici volti a generare un cambiamento culturale e sociale, in linea con la loro genealogia femminista (IRPPS

2021a). Una particolare attenzione è riservata all'analisi delle tensioni che si originano nello scontro tra le identità sedimentate in anni di pratica sociale e politica a fianco delle donne in condizione di violenza da un lato e, dall'altro, le tendenze burocratizzanti insite nel processo di regolamentazione di un campo che originariamente si è strutturato dal basso. In risposta a queste tendenze, in cui le opportunità di sussistenza possono celare rischi di relativizzazione e di trasformazione delle pratiche politiche sedimentate negli anni, ci si interroga sulla frontiera rappresentata dal riferimento all'esperienza del *commoning*, rispetto alla quale l'esperienza dei CAV condivide tratti e pratiche. Allo scopo di approfondire la fecondità di questa intersezione, successivamente si riflette sul caso di Lucha y Siesta (LyS), una delle prime realtà che sin dalla sua genesi rivendica l'adozione di una prospettiva femminista e trans-femminista e, al contempo, l'adesione al generale formato dei beni comuni urbani (Chatterton, 2010; Stavrides, 2015, 2024; Foster, Iaione, 2019). A partire da un'analisi del sistema di regole che la comunità ha scelto

di darsi in maniera partecipativa, si intende evidenziare come questa realtà possa prefigurare un'esperienza di innovazione sociale ampia e radicale. Infatti, grazie alla volontà di *placemaking* di uno spazio urbano abbandonato, LyS non solo fa esplicito riferimento alla dimensione di accompagnamento delle donne che vi si rivolgono, ma pone le basi affinché le pratiche e le attività condotte al suo interno siano al centro di una riflessione collettiva; questa postura si colloca appieno nella sfera pubblica urbana, non senza ambivalenze nei confronti della sfera istituzionale (fonte di finanziamento ma al tempo stesso vincolo alla piena autonomia dell'esperienza), dichiarando in maniera esplicita una nuova identità, in grado di incorporare l'esperienza dei centri anti violenza e delle case delle donne con la pratica del *commoning*.

Da un punto di vista metodologico, il lavoro segue una logica adduttiva (Timmermans, Tavory, 2014). Essa si basa su un approccio parallelo riferendosi, da una parte, alla riflessione teorica esistente su due fenomeni collocati nello spazio urbano e, dall'altra parte, prende in considerazione un caso di studio concreto - LyS. In questo modo è possibile mettere alla prova, mediante la costruzione di dati nella realtà empirica, le intersezioni e le convergenze tra le due dimensioni teorica ed empirica, facendo luce sulle pratiche di *commoning* e l'esperienza dei CAV. Prendendo avvio da una riflessione sulla letteratura specializzata volta ad evidenziare le principali dimensioni teoriche relative ai beni comuni di

genere nello spazio urbano, la successiva analisi della genesi, della funzione organizzativa e della *governance* dei CAV è stata condotta a partire dalla letteratura e dai dati quali-quantitativi rilevati da ISTAT e CNR-IRPPS. L'analisi del caso di Lucha y Siesta - definito come casa delle donne, centro anti violenza e, al contempo, bene comune relazionale di genere che abbraccia in modo specifico la prospettiva femminista e transfemminista - procede a verificare le aree di intersezione e convergenza tra la dimensione strutturale dei CAV e la pratica di *governance* e decisionale basata sul *commoning*, a partire da una analisi del testo dei principali documenti prodotti da LyS, disponibili online sul sito della Casa, e alle dimensioni in essi considerate.

L'analisi condotta sulla documentazione di LyS intende mettere in luce proprio la capacità generativa di questa pratica di *commoning*, femminista e transfemminista, nella prospettiva di costruire spazi urbani di genere.

### **Una lettura relazionale e di genere degli urban commons come modello di cura**

Nell'ambito degli studi urbani contemporanei, l'interesse accademico e la riflessione critica si sono profondamente concentrati sulla dimensione politica dei *commons* urbani, delineando un panorama di ricerca che interseca questioni sociopolitiche, economiche e giuridiche con un'enfasi particolare sul post-capitalismo (Gibson *et al.*, 2016) e le sfide dell'antropocene (Crutzen, 2006). La seminalità della classificazione

proposta da Elinor Ostrom (1990), che distingue i beni in categorie basate sui criteri di escludibilità e sottrattività, ha inaugurato un campo di indagine che rivela le complesse dinamiche di gestione delle risorse collettive all'interno dei contesti urbani. Tale approccio teorico non solo ha chiarito i meccanismi attraverso cui le comunità possono organizzare la gestione e la conservazione delle risorse, ma ha anche stimolato un'ampia riflessione sull'applicabilità di tali principi in ambiti urbani diversificati.

Le riflessioni di Crutzen (2006) e Gibson-Graham *et al.* (2016) hanno ulteriormente arricchito questo discorso, posizionando i *beni comuni* all'interno di un dibattito più ampio sulle alternative al modello capitalistico globale dominante e considerandoli come una pratica rivoluzionaria di associazione comunitaria connessa ad uno spazio urbano per finalità condivise di utilità comune. Questa pratica, che si estende oltre la mera gestione condivisa di risorse accessibili pubblicamente, è vista come un veicolo per la formazione di una nuova soggettività politica che emerge dall'integrazione tra movimenti sociali, progressi tecnologici e *framework* istituzionali innovativi.

L'analisi di Pinto *et al.* (2022) ha identificato, all'interno del tessuto urbano, il terreno fertile per l'attivazione di nuove istituzioni interstiziali. Queste istituzioni emergono in risposta all'esigenza di colmare i vuoti lasciati dalle strutture formali della città, sfruttando la ricchezza delle relazioni sociali e la disponibilità di spazi aperti

all'azione collettiva. La loro operatività, ancorata alla trasformazione di spazi urbani attraverso il *placemaking* e il *community building*, rivela un modello di interazione socio-spaziale che prevede la riattivazione di beni immobili pubblici precedentemente abbandonati e ora riconvertiti in luoghi di significato e valore comunitario.

Tale quadro teorico e applicativo si complica ulteriormente quando si considera la prospettiva post-capitalista che sollecita una riconsiderazione delle tipologie di beni urbani coinvolti in questi processi di trasformazione. La classificazione originaria di Ostrom, che va dai beni strettamente privati a quelli completamente pubblici, passando per i beni di *club* e i beni comuni, fornisce una base per comprendere le strategie di gestione comunitaria. Tuttavia, le elaborazioni successive, come quelle proposte dalla *critical urban theory* (Brenner, 2009), introducono la nozione di beni "relazionali". Questi beni presuppongono una gestione che non si limita alla semplice allocazione di risorse, ma che richiede un'orchestrazione strategica di risorse spaziali, umane e strumentali attraverso una continua negoziazione tra una molteplicità di attori.

La complessità intrinseca ai beni comuni urbani si manifesta nell'interazione dinamica tra la pluralità di attori cittadini: comunità locali, enti pubblici, organizzazioni del terzo settore e associazioni civiche collaborano per innescare innovazioni sociali e modalità inedite di gestione degli spazi cittadini. Data la loro natura e il lavoro di gestione comunitaria che li caratterizza, questi

spazi si fanno laboratori viventi di nuove pratiche sociali. Essi riflettono una varietà di modelli di gestione che rispecchiano le specificità culturali e organizzative di diversi contesti urbani, sia a livello internazionale che nazionale, su cui concentreremo la nostra analisi. In particolare, l'analisi dell'esperienza dei beni comuni fondata sugli usi civici nel contesto italiano non può prescindere dalla riflessione di Capone sul *commoning* tra società e proprietà (2013), sul diritto di uso civico (2016, 2017), con particolare riferimento all'esperienza napoletana (2021). Belingardi (2015, 2022) descrive le "comunanze" urbane come pratiche di cura e gestione dei luoghi; di tali esperienze viene segnalato inoltre il potenziale di generatività in termini di welfare, anche a beneficio di gruppi vulnerabili (Bonu *et al.*, 2022) e in contesti urbani con un crescente deficit di risorse economiche destinate a finalità sociali e assistenziali. Redi (2011) in una concettualizzazione di natura teorica e giuridica ha posto in luce come le sfide che i beni comuni si trovano ad affrontare nel sistema italiano sono legate alle dimensioni di sostenibilità e alla individuazione di un formato di governance. Così, nell'ambito italiano, l'esperienza dei beni comuni urbani si articola principalmente attraverso due modelli distinti ma complementari, che proviamo a definire, secondo la diffusione geografica originaria, il "modello Napoli" e il "modello Bologna", in cui il ruolo degli enti di governo locale si articola secondo modalità di governance istituzionale diversificata.

In questo senso, il primo modello si caratterizza per una gestione che privilegia l'iniziativa sociale dal basso e la risposta alla comunità urbana, cui segue, solo in un secondo momento e a determinate condizioni politiche, la collaborazione con le istituzioni cittadine. Questo modello, fondato sugli usi civici, valorizza l'autonomia delle realtà urbane di gestione dei beni comuni e la rispondenza alle esigenze relazionali e sociali delle comunità cittadine. Ne deriva una visione dei *commons* come spazi di autonomia collettiva, dove le pratiche si sviluppano in risposta diretta ai bisogni della comunità, abbracciando un'ampia gamma di attività che vanno dalle pratiche di cura agli orti comunitari e ai centri sociali e ogni attività di produzione artistica e culturale non istituzionalizzata. Queste esperienze, nella loro diversità, incarnano un modello che enfatizza l'autonomia sociale e una reticolarità comunitaria, caratteristiche chiave dei beni relazionali così come essi sono stati delineati, in letteratura, da Mandalaki Fotaki (2020).

In maniera più specifica, nel sistema italiano, il "modello Bologna" si distingue per un approccio più strutturato nella gestione dei beni comuni; in esso le istituzioni pubbliche cittadine esercitano un ruolo primario nell'istituzionalizzare le forme di interazione con le comunità urbane interessate alla loro gestione. Questo modello si basa su uno standard di patti amministrativi che definiscono regole, contenuti e modalità di gestione condivisa degli spazi urbani. Sebbene questo approccio possa sembrare più limitativo

rispetto alla libera espressività caratteristica del modello degli usi civici, esso svolge la funzione di esercitare un quadro di riferimento giuridico e organizzativo che facilita l'integrazione delle iniziative di *commoning* nel tessuto formale della città, indipendentemente dalla consonanza politica dei gestori dei beni comuni con le istituzioni pubbliche cittadine.

Entrambi i modelli riflettono l'adattabilità del concetto di bene comune alla diversità delle realtà urbane italiane, evidenziando come l'approccio alla gestione collettiva degli spazi urbani possa variare significativamente in funzione delle specificità culturali, sociali e amministrative dei diversi contesti. La contrapposizione tra la maggiore autonomia del modello degli usi civici e la strutturazione formale del modello dei patti di collaborazione pone in luce la ricchezza e la complessità delle pratiche esistenti nel sistema italiano. Restano da approfondire le modalità con cui questi due modelli possono essere adattati ad un sistema di *commoning* sensibile alla dimensione del genere nelle pratiche sociali e nelle decisioni istituzionali delle città. Sul tema Brandtner *et al.* (2023) hanno osservato come la dimensione relazionale, processuale e sociale dei beni comuni urbani possa costituire lo snodo di partenza per la realizzazione di infrastrutture sociali di livello urbano alternative o supplenti rispetto alla dimensione del servizio di natura pubblica. In particolare, la specificità di questo nuovo modello di infrastrutturazione sociale su base cittadina risiede nella circostanza

che gli spazi urbani attivati dalle comunità sociali possano essere oggetto di un modello di gestione socialmente innovativa, in grado di gestire accesso, partecipazione e partenariati estesi tra ambiti di intervento differenti e convergenti. Il tema dei beni comuni urbani come nuove infrastrutture sociali e come *driver* dello sviluppo anche economico delle città (Vittoria, 2019) si connette a fondo con la dimensione di cura, anche relazionale. Adottando una prospettiva di genere è possibile, inoltre, porre l'accento sulle risorse collettive che emergono dalle relazioni di cura e solidarietà femminista (Federici 2012), le quali hanno il potere di trasformare la struttura di genere delle comunità (Gibson-Graham *et al.* 2013). La loro capacità di generare infrastrutture sociali mediante la dimensione relazionale e la reticolarità sociale si innesta sul lavoro di analisi condotto - tanto sui *commons* urbani quanto sulla risoggettivizzazione politica delle donne nel contesto locale - da Gibson-Graham *et al.* (2016), che teorizza forme emergenti a livello globale di politica localizzata e sussidiaria dalle donne e per le donne. L'impegno diretto e comunitario delle donne per trasformare le dimensioni sociali ed economiche di prossimità, in una pratica etica e politica quotidiana di costruzione di "economie di comunità", ipotizzato da Gibson-Graham *et al.* trova nella dimensione dei *commons* urbani, di cura e di relazione agiti da comunità femminili, centrati su questioni di equità e giustizia di genere e rivolti alle donne. Sulla linea di convergenza tra donne, città e beni

comuni, la letteratura scientifica italiana ha presentato contributi importanti di Belingardi *et al.* (2019) e, più recentemente di Bonu *et al.* (2023), in cui l'intreccio tra spazi urbani e violenza di genere viene correttamente rappresentata, ipotizzando risposte, per il relativo superamento, anche a partire dall'esperienza dei beni comuni. Più specificamente, con riferimento all'esperienza italiana dei CAV, collocati prevalentemente come risposta dal basso nei contesti urbani spesso carenti dal punto di vista di infrastrutture e attività di intervento (Busi *et al.* 2021), viene delineata da Campani Romanin (2016) come la pratica sociale di organizzazioni agite in una prospettiva relazionale di genere. Nella stessa direzione Creazzo (2016) sottolinea la capacità di agire come elementi di giuntura tra politica di genere a livello di prossimità, competenze e pratiche di intervento. Queste interpretazioni, che si connettono con la dimensione storica e organizzativa dei CAV, ne sottolineano elementi che consentono di accostare queste peculiari esperienze di cura all'ambito del *commoning* relazionale di genere. Intendiamo abbracciare questa prospettiva nell'analisi tanto dei CAV in generale, quanto nel caso di Lucha y Siesta, che adotta in maniera più specifica la dimensione prospettica di bene comune relazionale femminista e transfemminista. Nel paragrafo successivo si evidenzierà infatti che, sebbene i CAV storici siano riconducibili a una genealogia femminista, non tutti quelli sorti successivamente la rivendicano o possono essere riconosciuti come ta-

li, laddove invece tutti adottano una prospettiva di bene comune relazionale di genere, con un orientamento alla cura e al supporto delle donne in uscita da percorsi di violenza. Nel caso specifico di Lucha y Siesta l'adozione di un paradigma di bene comune femminista e transfemminista si articola come una lettura più specifica, individuata e culturalmente situata della missione di bene comune relazionale di genere.

Di seguito saranno quindi analizzate tanto la genesi e la cultura organizzativa e relazionale dei CAV su base nazionale, quanto la specifica esperienza nel contesto romano di Lucha y Siesta - che si definisce esplicitamente al contempo "bene comune femminista e transfemminista".

### **I Centri antiviolenza in Italia: geni e traiettorie**

La nascita dei centri antiviolenza, intesi come spazi sicuri, in cui le donne aiutano altre donne<sup>2</sup> nel proprio percorso di fuoriuscita dalla violenza e di empowerment<sup>3</sup>, si iscrive nell'azione dei movimenti delle donne e femministi, i quali hanno creato le condizioni affinché la violenza maschile diventasse visibile, attraverso un'azione di sensibilizzazione e resistenza che ha consentito di mettere sotto accusa la rete di complicità, anche istituzionali, che ha storicamente consentito a violenti e maltrattanti di agire indisturbati (Romito, 2015). Se negli anni Settanta, le manifestazioni di massa e le azioni di protesta erano volte a modificare le norme giuridiche e sociali che riproducono il controllo sui corpi del-



le donne e la violenza a cui sono esposte (Donato, 2024), negli anni Ottanta si è privilegiato un attivismo locale e la strutturazione di una risposta concreta alla violenza emersa, in tutta la sua estensione e drammaticità, nei gruppi di auto-coscienza (Pietrobelli, 2021).

Le testimonianze storiche relative alla comparsa delle prime case delle donne fanno riferimento all'appropriazione di spazi urbani in disuso e alla creazione di luoghi fondati a misura dei bisogni e dei desideri delle donne, entro cui definire azioni volte a scardinare l'ordine di genere esperito in tutti gli altri spazi, pubblici e privati. Nell'ottobre del 1976, a seguito dell'occupazione del palazzo Nardini, una ex pretura in via del Governo Vecchio a Roma, nasce la Casa della donna (Baeri Parisi, 2016) in cui, nonostante le minacce di sgombero e di condizioni abitative precarie a causa dell'assenza di corrente elettrica, sono stati da subito previsti spazi adibiti a un asilo nido, a consultorio e alla realizzazione di assemblee, che porteranno l'anno successivo alla formazione del Collettivo contro la violenza alle donne<sup>4</sup>. Se questa e le altre esperienze degli anni Settanta, sorte dalle azioni del Movimento di liberazione della donna, si caratterizzavano come luoghi politici in cui elaborare due esperienze ricorrenti nella vita delle donne, ovvero l'aborto e la violenza sessuale, la nascita dei CAV propriamente detti viene fatta risalire alla seconda metà degli anni Ottanta, come effetto della compresenza di alcune condizioni: il *milieu* culturale prodotto dall'affermarsi del fem-

minismo della differenza<sup>5</sup>, i contatti stabiliti tra le attiviste italiane e le prime esperienze delle case rifugio (CR) straniere e l'impulso proveniente dall'Unione delle donne italiane, che ha portato alla nascita dei primi Centri delle donne (Creazzo, 2008). Sin da subito, i CAV italiani si caratterizzano per una doppia originalità: da un lato, il primato della politica sulla professionalità e, dall'altro, uno spostamento dell'attenzione dall'oppressione delle donne all'affermazione del desiderio e della progettualità femminile (ibidem).

Tutt'oggi, stando alle dichiarazioni delle stesse operatrici, un aspetto caratterizzante i centri antiviolenza di matrice femminista è rappresentato dalla metodologia dell'accoglienza basata sulla relazione tra donne, la quale poggia sul presupposto del mutuo riconoscimento tra operatrice e donna sopravvissuta<sup>6</sup> e prevede un ascolto non giudicante e la co-costruzione del percorso di fuoriuscita dalla violenza a partire dall'accoglimento dei bisogni e delle aspettative della donna, nonché dal rispetto dei suoi tempi e delle sue volontà, nella prospettiva ultima di restituirla *l'agency* (Busi *et al.*, 2021).

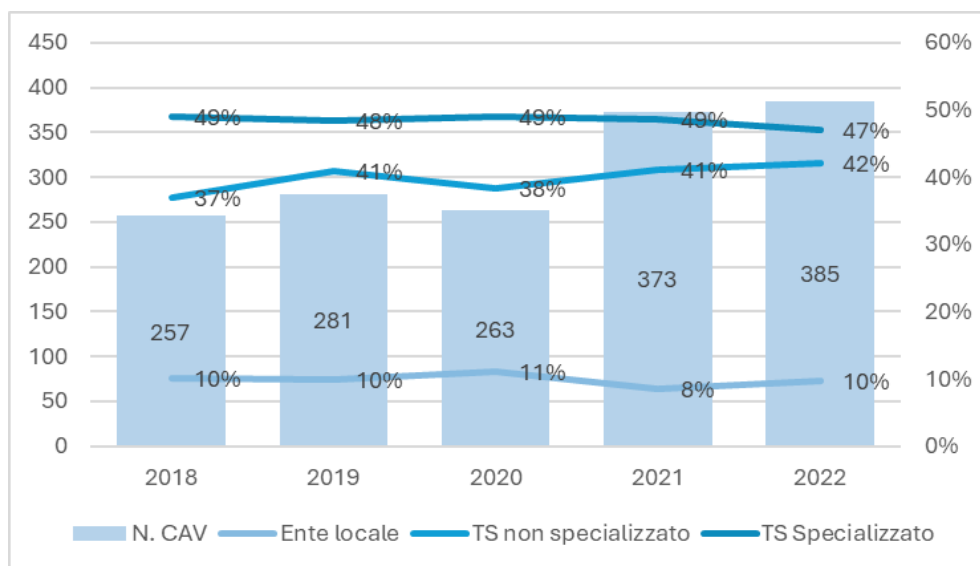
La relazione tra donne non è intesa alla stregua di un fatto privato ma come atto eminentemente politico che si esercita tanto nella relazione con le donne con vissuti di violenza quanto in quella con le donne delle istituzioni, "perché le operatrici portano il valore collettivo dei saperi delle donne dei Centri, conseguiti attraverso la pratica e la formazione" (Guarnieri 2018, p.21). In

considerazione della loro genealogia, che si alimenta progressivamente alla luce delle nuove ondate di movimenti femministi (ibidem), i centri antiviolenza rivendicano quindi una finalità politica e trasformativa, che si declina in numerose azioni svolte sul territorio, che vanno dalla sensibilizzazione della popolazione, alla formazione degli altri operatori territoriali chiamati ad intervenire nella protezione delle donne con vissuti di violenza, fino all'azione di sollecitazione degli attori politici presenti ai diversi livelli per la definizione di norme, politiche e interventi di prevenzione e contrasto alla violenza maschile contro le donne (Demurtas, Misiti, 2021).

Facendo leva anche su questi tratti caratterizzanti della loro azione, le operatrici dei centri antiviolenza di matrice femminista definiscono non di rado la loro prospettiva in contrapposizione a quella degli operatori di altri servizi accusati, da un lato, di riprodurre una logica prestazionale che mal si concilia con le necessità delle donne sopravvissute alla violenza e, dall'altro, di non adottare la prospettiva relazionale di genere, ritenuta imprescindibile per una reale comprensione delle dinamiche e delle conseguenze delle violenze nelle relazioni intime, considerate in continuità con le discriminazioni e le violenze esperite dalle donne nello spazio pubblico (IRPPS, 2021b). Più in generale, nonostante a seconda dei territori possano essere assimilati agli altri servizi sociali, essendo inquadrati come tali nella normativa regionale (Pasian, Proia 2021), i centri antiviolenza di matrice femmini-

sta affermano la sostanziale alterità tra un lavoro di accoglienza, supporto e rappresentanza della donna e la prestazione erogata da un servizio pubblico (IRPPS, 2021b).

A partire da queste considerazioni, non si faticano a comprendere le molteplici tensioni che si sono originate nel processo di sviluppo dei CAV segnato, oltre che dalla progressiva organizzazione in rete di quelli riconducibili a una genealogia femminista<sup>7</sup>, da un processo di differenziazione derivante dall'ingresso nel campo di nuovi soggetti. Nonostante la carenza di dati statistici ufficiali, disponibili solo a partire dalle indagini Istat realizzate dal 2018, alla luce dei documenti prodotti dai centri è possibile affermare che negli anni Novanta si è assistito ad un loro forte dinamismo: durante il Primo convegno nazionale delle Case delle donne e dei Centri Antiviolenza, avvenuto nel 1996, si contavano circa 70 realtà, diventate circa un centinaio durante il Secondo convegno nel 2003 (Demurtas, 2022). Dieci anni dopo, è stata rilevata la presenza di 132 centri antiviolenza, di cui 105 gestiti da associazioni di donne e femministe e 65 case rifugio (WAVE, 2013). Oltre che testimoniare il progressivo sviluppo dei CAV e delle Cr quest'ultimo dato evidenzia per la prima volta la presenza di gestori del terzo settore non riconducibili alla matrice femminista. Un dato confermato cinque anni dopo dalla prima indagine nazionale condotta da ISTAT e CNR-IRPPS che, accanto ad associazioni "specializzate" nel supporto delle donne che vivono in situazione di violenza, descrivono



## Evoluzione dei Centri antiviolenza (v.a) sul territorio nazionale e dell'incidenza dei diversi soggetti gestori (%)

Anni 2018-2022

Fonte: nostre elaborazioni su dati Istat

Fig. 1

la presenza di altri soggetti del terzo settore, qui definiti “non specializzati” in quanto non si occupano esclusivamente di violenza di genere ma spesso gestiscono più servizi dedicati a diverse tipologie di utenza (Fig. 1).

Questo mutamento è stato condizionato dal crescente intervento pubblico, in particolare in seguito alla ratifica della *Convenzione del Consiglio d'Europa sulla prevenzione e la lotta contro la violenza nei confronti delle donne e la violenza domestica* (Demurtas, Misiti, 2021). Pur ricordando che questo passo ha segnato una svolta positiva per il sistema dell'antiviolenza in Italia<sup>5</sup>, con specifico riferimento al mondo dei CAV possono essere isolati alcuni effetti controversi. Sebbene infatti l'introduzione di un trasferimento annuale di risorse dal livello nazionale alle regioni (L. n.119/2013) segni un indubbio riconoscimento<sup>8</sup> del ruolo che svolgono per la

protezione e il supporto delle donne, sono state segnalate numerose criticità in riferimento al totale dei fondi stanziati e ai tempi del loro trasferimento (IRPPS, 2021b). Oltre a ciò, è stato evidenziato come i finanziamenti pubblici portino con sé la richiesta di un adeguamento a requisiti di natura amministrativa che mal si concilia con le pratiche dei centri: le riflessioni condotte dalle operatrici hanno evidenziato che il controllo statale e la burocratizzazione delle procedure possono mettere in discussione i principi stessi su cui si incardina la metodologia di accoglienza basata sulla relazione tra donne (Demurtas, Toffanin, 2024).

Altre tensioni si sono concentrate intorno al testo dell'Intesa Stato-Regioni del 2014, recante i requisiti minimi che CAV e CR erano chiamati a possedere per accedere ai fondi pubblici. Questo testo ha rappresentato un terreno di scontro

tra tendenze alla professionalizzazione e rivendicazione di pratiche di lavoro fortemente connotate in termini identitari: un esempio su tutti è dato dalla richiesta fatta ai centri di dotarsi di figure professionali specializzate (psicologhe, assistenti sociali, ecc.) senza riconoscere al contempo le specificità dell'operatrice di accoglienza, una figura che si è formata nella pratica quotidiana all'interno dei centri antiviolenza ed è considerata per questo altamente specializzata. Il nuovo testo dell'Intesa, approvato nel 2022, ha in parte accolto le istanze dei CAV, invertendo la tendenza professionalizzante e riconoscendo centralità alla pratica e alla metodologia della relazione tra donne, in particolare sottolineando il ruolo dell'operatrice di accoglienza e il primato di una formazione specifica sulla violenza rispetto al titolo di studio delle altre figure professionali.

A fronte delle spinte alla "normalizzazione" (Creazzo, 2016) derivanti dal processo di regolamentazione statale di un campo che si è strutturato dal basso, questi esempi mostrano come i centri antiviolenza di matrice femminista abbiano nel tempo attuato strategie di resistenza volte a preservare pratiche lavorative coerenti con i principi e le finalità politiche che li hanno ispirati fin dalle origini. Nel paragrafo successivo, a partire dall'analisi di un caso specifico, esploreremo come queste strategie possano essere declinate esplicitamente tenendo conto della cornice del *commoning*, nella prospettiva di evidenziare la fecondità di questa intersezione.

### **Pratiche transfemministe di *commoning*: la casa delle donne di Lucha y Siesta**

Nel paragrafo precedente abbiamo visto come i movimenti delle donne e femministi abbiano espresso, nella loro capacità di costruire dal basso e al di fuori dei sistemi istituzionalizzati, un'importante capacità sovversiva (Busi, Fiorilli, 2014). Appare allora interessante guardare all'esperienza che la Casa delle donne di Lucha y Siesta sta portando avanti dal 2008 a Roma non solo in quanto, dopo anni di "r-esistenza" (Pistoni, 2013) e intensa riflessione collettiva, si identifica come innovativa esperienza di autogoverno di un bene comune femminista e transfemminista, ma anche perché riconosciamo in questa esperienza una rinnovata capacità sovversiva nel ri-nominare e ri-significare spazi di azione materiali e simbolici con una postura tipica del più recente femminismo intersezionale. A questo scopo, saranno discussi alcuni passi significativi tratti da alcuni testi prodotti da LyS e disponibili nella sezione "Lucha è" del suo sito *on line*, in particolare quelli riferiti alla descrizione della Casa e alla dichiarazione di autogoverno adottata nel 2022 (LyS, 2022).

#### **La Casa**

"Le donne che quel giorno hanno varcato il cancello di via Lucio Sestio venivano dal movimento per la casa, dal femminismo, dal contrasto alla violenza e avevano capito che l'autonomia delle donne e delle loro scelte veniva spezzata proprio all'intreccio di queste istanze. Al momento

di dover andare via di casa per uscire dalla situazione violenta, le alternative – le case, i posti per vivere – erano terribilmente insufficienti”<sup>9</sup>. LyS nasce per dare risposta concreta a questo stato di fatto. Le donne che devono allontanarsi da situazioni di violenza non solo devono poter accedere a luoghi sicuri in cui costruire il proprio percorso di emancipazione dalla violenza, ma devono poter contare su di una rete di soggettività volta al rafforzamento di questo processo di autodeterminazione che deve farsi nel perseguimento dell’indipendenza economica, finanziaria, lavorativa e senz’altro abitativa. Sempre sul sito si legge che “la violenza di genere è trasversale, sistemica, strutturale e stratificata, i posti per l’accoglienza sono ancora terribilmente insufficienti così come i luoghi, materiali e simbolici, per praticare alternative possibili e necessarie”. Dunque, c’è l’urgenza del luogo materiale dove costruire percorsi di autonomia ma vi è parimenti l’urgenza di un luogo dove nominare la realtà per costruire altri mondi possibili, altre significazioni della realtà. E ancora, la Casa “è uno spazio di relazione femminista e transfemminista in cui si elaborano, sperimentano e praticano politiche di genere e di *commoning* intersezionali”. LyS si situa entro la politica dei *commons* e delle pratiche comunitarie<sup>10</sup> definendo con una postura intersezionale nuove strategie per promuovere dal basso processi trasformativi della realtà, in un paese in cui luoghi di affermazione di genere scarseggiano. Così come il processo di emancipazione non può

che farsi in un inevitabile intreccio di istanze, la ri-appropriazione di un luogo che è “centro anti-violenza, casa di accoglienza per donne in percorsi di fuoriuscita dalla violenza, polo culturale, luogo di confronto e crescita collettiva” non può che avvenire in un processo di *commoning* che si fa trasversale in alleanza con altre istanze sociali, innanzitutto quelle legate al diritto alla casa e all’abitare.

### **La Dichiarazione di autogoverno: principi**

LyS abita a Roma dal 2008 nel quartiere del Quadraro, via Lucio Sestio 10, qui “pratica un uso femminista e transfemminista, di cura, non esclusivo, auto normato, inclusivo, orizzontale del suo spazio”<sup>11</sup>. In due anni di lavoro “collettivo e cooperativo” ha elaborato nel 2022 una dichiarazione di autogoverno: attraverso dei laboratori di progettazione partecipata realizzati in due anni (settembre 2020-2022) la comunità che anima LyS ha riconosciuto l’esperienza di pratica maturata in 14 anni e l’ha proiettata verso nuove “traiettorie e connessioni”. LyS si definisce processo, bene comune femminista e transfemminista in costante mutamento perché definita dalla comunità che la attraversa e abita, un “noi” che si contraddistingue perché si sottrae alla norma binaria ed eterosessuale imposta.

LyS è bene comune a gestione condivisa dalla comunità che la “vive e attraversa” ed ha come principale obiettivo il contrasto alla violenza di genere e dei generi. Innanzitutto, contribuisce allo “svelamento” delle diverse forme di vio-

lenza, “economica, fisica e sessuale, culturale e verbale, psicologica, razziale, ambientale, istituzionale”, agita contro le donne, minori e persone lgbtqia+, e del “lavoro di cura e riproduttivo, invisibile e non retribuito (o fortemente sottopagato), svolto nell’ambito delle relazioni familiari e sociali”<sup>12</sup> La stratificazione delle violenze è resa visibile mettendo a fuoco anche i diversi e possibili sistemi di oppressione, l’approccio infatti di LyS è “intersezionale, decoloniale ed ecosistemico”. A partire da tale approccio, LyS mira a mappare forme e ambiti della violenza e sperimentare “pratiche innovative in tema di politiche di genere e di educazione alle relazioni, all’affettività, alle differenze”. Ed è allora per questo che assume come valori imprescindibili “l’antifascismo, l’antirazzismo, l’antisessismo, il contrasto all’omolesbobitransafobia, la decostruzione degli stereotipi di genere e la lotta all’abilismo”. LyS condivide le pratiche antiviolenza, accoglie e ospita costruendo comunità e sostenendo percorsi “autodeterminati”, è “porta di accesso ai diritti” di genere ovvero è spazio in cui costruire significazione con “metodologie situate e mai neutre”, è pratica di autodeterminazione e liberazione. È spazio di cura e autocura, in costante relazione con l’ambiente nel suo complesso ed è per questo che viene sottolineata la postura ecosistemica. In questo spazio un ruolo importante viene riconosciuto a bambin3 e ragazz3 che partecipano attivamente alla significazione dello spazio di LyS. Accanto all’impegno di esistenza e resistenza vi è lo spazio della

“siesta fertile<sup>13</sup>” entro quello “spazio bianco<sup>14</sup>” in cui anche le “utopie quotidiane” si compiono.

### **Riflessioni**

LyS abita uno stabile liberato (Pistoni, 2013), un’ex stazione elettrica della Stefer abbandonata la cui proprietà era riconducibile ad ATAC, entrando nel composito e variegato universo dei tanti luoghi del patrimonio immobiliare che insistono nel Comune di Roma, inutilizzati e trascurati e che vengono recuperati e consegnati alla cittadinanza con scopi e modalità diverse (Simoncini, 2017, 2018). Un atto che, come abbiamo visto, risponde a necessità basilari, quale quello di dare un tetto alle donne<sup>15</sup>, aprendo ad altri diritti sociali e di cittadinanza (Pistoni, 2013), ma che si radica anche nel bisogno di una diversa qualità dell’abitare, “intesa in termini di possibilità di plasmare e qualificare il luogo in cui si vive” (Cellamare, 2016), agendo un progetto politico ampio. Ed è per questa necessità di agire pratiche trasformative di luoghi e relazioni, dentro e fuori le comunità che vivono il processo, che anche LyS è esperienza emblematica tra i conflitti urbani romani, sia come contrasto alla mercificazione della città sia come contrasto all’ineadeguatezza del welfare pubblico e soprattutto all’incertezza dei diritti delle donne. Nel 2019, lo stabile viene inserito nel concordato preventivo tra ATAC e il Comune con la conseguente messa all’asta per evitare il fallimento dell’azienda, la quale aveva già avviato il percorso legale con una vertenza che durerà fino a gennaio 2024.

Nel 2021, anno entro cui ATAC avrebbe dovuto vendere lo stabile, la Regione Lazio lo acquista scongiurando lo sgombero e questo dà nuovo slancio alla comunità di LyS che, come abbiamo visto, discute la dichiarazione di autogoverno. Tuttavia, dopo quindici anni di costruzione di un presidio dell'antiviolenza punto di riferimento nella città, di tavoli istituzionali che hanno spinto la Regione a comprare lo stabile dell'Atac riconoscendo il progetto di LyS come occasione per costruire un innovativo progetto di bene comune urbano, nell'ottobre 2023 la nuova giunta regionale adotta una delibera che dispone lo svuotamento della Casa, il ricollocamento dei nuclei accolti, la ristrutturazione e la messa a bando. Nel gennaio 2024 si chiude intanto il processo penale per occupazione, ove ATAC si era costituita come parte civile per poi ritirarsi il 24 novembre 2023, e LyS viene assolta. Un futuro ancora da costruire nelle relazioni con le Istituzioni, auspicabilmente in un'ottica di collaborazione e non cooptazione così da dialogare alla pari con le istituzioni locali e nazionali (LyS, 2022); mantenere questo tipo di presidio antiviolenza così come costruito nel tempo - ovvero un luogo che si è fatto bene comune in una pratica femminista e transfemminista, un luogo di accesso a diritti di genere - è una scelta eminentemente politica che può tener conto degli strumenti giuridici pure esistenti per poter valorizzare il processo avviato. In particolare, i regolamenti sulla gestione e cura condivisa (che anche Roma Capitale ha adottato nel 2023) e le nuove forme di usi civici e

collettivi urbani, mirano a superare concessioni, appalti e affidamenti di beni pubblici e a fornire un perimetro certo, anche per le amministrazioni, per assicurare una gestione sussidiaria di spazi organizzati su base comunitaria. In questa aspra conflittualità sul diritto all'abitare<sup>16</sup> luoghi e comunità, LyS è però riconosciuta di fatto dalle stesse Istituzioni quale nodo della rete locale antiviolenza nel momento in cui, data la scarsità di spazi disponibili, vi è necessità di far fronte a situazioni di pericolo di donne e minori (Pistoni, 2013). Viene in sostanza riconosciuto non tanto il luogo-stabile occupato ma lo spazio-comunità che abita e attraversa LyS. Lucha y Siesta, sempre secondo la documentazione analizzata per questo contributo, "si sostanzia in una trama di relazioni che si infittisce, ispirandoci a tessere una visione a mosaico della nostra identità collettiva che è allo stesso tempo una pratica (dell'inclusività, della pluralità, della multidimensionalità), una strategia politica e un obiettivo (...) tessere con identità proprie che partecipano a un disegno complessivo mai statico" (LyS, 2022), persone singole, associazioni, gruppi informali, attiviste, donne, bambin3 che attraversano e abitano a vario titolo la Casa. In questo LyS esprime l'esperienza del fare comune: senza comunità senza relazioni di qualità non vi è bene che possa dirsi comune (Federici, 2012), e la forza delle relazioni intrecciate dentro e fuori la casa che permette di resistere e praticare quelle utopie quotidiane (Cooper, 2016) che pure tentano di trasformare spazi e sogget-

tività coinvolte e fornire risposte concrete a bisogni sociali. La concretezza dell'esperienza di LyS, di "azione diretta" (Federici, 2018), della sperimentazione di spazi e pratiche che possano problematizzare i sistemi dominanti aprono alla trasformazione a modi di vita più egualitari democratici ed emancipativi (Cooper, 2016; Fano Morrissey, Serughetti, 2024); dove il termine stesso di casa, smette di essere luogo simbolo di oppressione per farsi nuova identità collettiva, luogo di contro-potere (Federici, 2012), di resistenza (hooks, 1991) di una diversa familiarità e cittadinanza (Bonu *et al.*, 2020). Ed è per questo che si rafforza la necessità di identificare questa esperienza nella sua processualità, il verbo *commoning* (il produrre comune) enfatizza questo aspetto del divenire del movimento e della trasformazione che avviene nelle comunità cooperanti, dove non vi sono confini netti ma zone liminali: nella dichiarazione di autogoverno, e non di autogestione o di adozione di statuto, risiede un tentativo di collocarsi nel contesto delle decisioni e pratiche della democrazia diretta, dove tentare una riappropriazione, restituzione e diffusione di potere (Caleo, 2016) rispetto a istanze diversificate e questioni che attraversano le soggettività partecipanti. È in questo senso appropriazione e possibilità di azione in spazi liminali (Antonucci, Sorice, Volterrani, 2024) degli assetti istituzionali e urbani (Brunori, Musso, 2023), ma anche nuova pratica di intervento di cura sociale, di welfare comunitario, di politiche di genere e nuove istituzio-

ni dal basso. In questo senso l'idea del comune ha "funzione ideologica" ed è "concetto prefigurante" (Federici, 2018) in quanto nella azione diretta cerca di prefigurare un impegno collettivo verso un interesse comune, una società cooperante sia nella costruzione di soluzioni concrete e idonee a bisogni sociali sia nella ricostituzione di un tessuto sociale sfaldato dai rapporti capitalistici (Federici, 2018).

### Conclusioni

Abbiamo visto come l'esperienza dei primi centri antiviolenza in Italia abbia rappresentato una importante innovazione: il movimento delle donne, al di fuori dei sistemi istituzionalizzati di intervento pubblico, ha dato la prima risposta specifica al tema della violenza di genere, anticipando anche la necessità di ripensare in un'ottica integrata e reticolare gli interventi del welfare (Cimagalli, 2014). Nei CAV non si realizza infatti una mera "presa in carico" delle donne e dei/delle figli/e che vivono in situazione di violenza ma un percorso di accompagnamento all'autodeterminazione, che si coniuga con una pratica politica tesa ad eradicare le radici socio-culturali delle violenze maschili agite sulle donne (Demurtas *et al.*, 2021). L'accoglienza e il supporto non sono definiti attraverso le professionalità presenti in un rapporto asimmetrico e consulenziale, ma si radicano nello spazio di ascolto e di parola che si costruisce tra donne, uno spazio in cui si nominano le violenze e si costruiscono rinnovate progettualità. È questa metodologia po-



litica e relazionale che contraddistingue i CAV di matrice femminista, rendendoli non mero servizio volto a colmare una mancata o debole azione dello Stato sociale (Creazzo, 2008) ma un vero bene comune dal carattere relazionale. Si è osservato che, di pari passo con l'incremento dei finanziamenti pubblici, il panorama dei centri antiviolenza è in parte mutato, con il progressivo ingresso nel campo di soggetti non riconducibili alla matrice storica dei movimenti femministi. Inoltre, anche con riferimento a questi ultimi si è osservato che, sebbene i finanziamenti pubblici siano considerati linfa vitale, le procedure burocratiche, le impellenze di tipo amministrativo e le tempistiche derivanti, possano ingenerare dei cortocircuiti che minacciano la praticabilità della metodologia della relazione tra donne. Alla luce delle sfide che le mutate condizioni di contesto comportano, una riflessione sull'intersezione tra il modello delle pratiche femministe e quello del *commons* urbano fornisce spunti di riflessione utili a favorire l'identificazione di strategie di resistenza in grado di garantire la riproduzione di pratiche politiche tuttora considerate come un tratto caratterizzante dell'azione dei centri antiviolenza.

Soprattutto in un contesto in cui le politiche urbane di genere abbiano manifestato una dimensione prevalentemente simbolica (Antonucci *et al.*, 2024), questi spazi per la cura basata sui legami delle donne con vissuti di violenza possono qualificarsi in maniera sussidiaria come esperienze comunitarie localizzate in un conte-

sto spaziale e relazionale di *commons* di genere; è il caso di quei CAV, taluni dei quali di matrice dichiaratamente femminista, che spesso si sono mossi nella direzione del *commoning*. In questi specifici casi, con l'adozione del paradigma dei beni comuni, è emersa la dimensione di istituzioni interstiziali, ossia generate dai bisogni del contesto e dalla costruzione di risposte in formato associato in ambiti spaziali specifici per finalità di interesse collettivo.

Dentro questa prospettiva adottata da taluni CAV che si identificano come beni comuni relazionali di genere, è stato interessante osservare l'esperienza di Lucha y Siesta che, nel contesto romano di Centri e Case delle donne, si qualifica esplicitamente come bene comune femminista e transfemminista. Questa specifica identità di *commons* femminista e transfemminista è rinvenibile a partire dagli strumenti di autogoverno e dal processo decisionale assembleare di cui LyS si è dotata, sulla scorta del già presente, forte orientamento relazionale verso le destinatarie dell'attività della casa. La documentazione analizzata evidenzia infatti come pienamente e deliberatamente questa esperienza rinvii al modello dei beni comuni urbani e relazionali e di genere, ed in particolare a quell'insieme di pratiche trasformative che attingono a risorse collettive di solidarietà femminista.

LyS non è la sola realtà di tale universo di pratiche a muoversi esplicitamente nell'orizzonte di senso dei *commons* urbani relazionali e di genere, con una spiccata prospettiva, in questo ca-

so, femminista e transfemminista. Solo per fare altri due esempi, a Ravenna è stato stipulato un patto di collaborazione tra il comune e la Casa delle Donne<sup>17</sup>, a Livorno è in corso un dibattito attorno al Centro donna di Livorno, al fine di intendere questa realtà come bene comune<sup>18</sup>. Il tema dei commons relazionali di genere tocca, in maniera diversa, a seconda della adozione o meno della prospettiva femminista e transfemminista, diverse realtà di questo mondo ed è importante comprendere, nel futuro, quale sia il paradigma più ampio e inclusivo per leggere l'evoluzione delle differenti realtà.

In quest'ottica, possono allora i *commons* urbani relazionali di genere qualificarsi come un nuovo, ampio paradigma di intervento – in cui si possano collocare anche realtà specificamente femministe e transfemministe – atto a risolvere in via sussidiaria, i grandi temi di genere nei contesti urbani su cui le istituzioni pubbliche appaiono ancora in ritardo nella elaborazione di risposte? La ri-soggettivazione delle donne nelle politiche urbane e nell'esercizio di attività di cura e relazione nella dimensione di prossimità dei CAV secondo il modello dei *commons* urbani di genere sembra collocarsi in questa dimensione. E ancora: può la dimensione dei *commons* relazionali di genere interpretata tra i due alternativi paradigmi degli usi civici e del sistema patto per l'amministrazione condivisa sussumere in sé le risposte necessarie che un sistema sociale particolarmente attivo ha elaborato per le donne, senza al tempo stesso, inibire il necessa-

rio sviluppo di risposte che i sistemi di governo locale devono apportare per i cittadini nelle politiche urbane?

Si tratta di una serie di interrogativi che hanno a che vedere non solo con l'adeguatezza dell'inquadramento dei CAV entro il framework dei *commons* urbani relazionali di genere, ma con la stessa funzione di *governance* pubblico-privato-non profit che sistemi complessi di elaborazione delle politiche pubbliche di genere necessitano, sollecitando un ruolo di responsabilità degli attori pubblici in questi ambiti di intervento.

In altri termini, se le risposte e le proposte avanzate dai CAV nell'ambito delle politiche pubbliche di prevenzione e contrasto alla violenza di genere possono qualificarsi come *commons*, secondo un percorso di sviluppo che può essere considerato, a seconda dei casi, integrato o alternativo al paradigma della "terzosettorizzazione", questa tendenza non può verificarsi in carenza di una precisa forma di relazione tra attori della sfera pubblica locale e soggetti attivi nell'urban commoning di genere. In questo contributo abbiamo cercato di restituire alcuni insights sul panorama di letterature e pratiche che analizza le interconnessioni tra gli interventi a favore delle donne vittime di violenza e l'approccio dei beni comuni secondo una progressiva intensione concettuale che dai commons relazionali, procede verso i commons relazionali di genere, per poi focalizzarsi sui commons relazionali di genere con approccio (trans) femminista, cui è dedicato il terzo caso studio.

Nella nostra prospettiva alcuni CAV stanno sempre riflettendo sulla possibilità di adottare il paradigma dei commons-relazionali di genere come pratica di innovazione. Al tempo stesso, realtà culturalmente più affini al modello dei commons e del femminismo e del transfemminismo, come LyS, definiscono sperimentalmente la propria identità come bene comune che si occupa di questioni di genere e violenza con approccio femminista e transfemminista. Questo tipo di sperimentaltà, all'intersezione tra *commoning*, interventi di genere e approccio femminista e transfemminista, si pone come un caso rilevante per comprendere possibili direzioni di sviluppo e resistenza alle tendenze burocratizzanti insite nel processo di progressiva regolamentazione di questo campo. Esse arrivano ad intersecare il *commoning* di genere, gli approcci più recenti del femminismo e le questioni di conflittualità nel riconoscimento, specchio di una tensione - non sempre espressa - tra pratiche sociali dal basso e risposte istituzionali, che si verifica con modalità peculiari all'interno delle politiche e degli interventi per la cura delle donne.

## Note

<sup>1</sup>Le autrici e l'autore sono qui elencati in ordine alfabetico. Inoltre le autrici e l'autore hanno progettato e discusso insieme il presente contributo, redigendo in comune l'introduzione e le conclusioni. Per comodità redazionali, tuttavia, si segnala che Maria Cristina Antonucci ha redatto il par. 2, Pietro Demurtas ha redatto il paragrafo 3, Francesca Proia ha redatto il paragrafo 4.

<sup>2</sup>In questo contributo proviamo a fornire una definizione territoriale delle pratiche di commoning a partire dalle esperienze verificatesi nei diversi contesti urbani e con riferimento alla ricezione normativa e politica delle stesse. Secondo questa logica, definiamo modello Napoli, le esperienze di commoning scaturite dalla stagione degli usi civici e dal successivo riconoscimento politico delle stesse; per contro consideriamo paradigmatica l'esperienza generata da Labsus, associazione che teorizza e sostiene la concretizzazione dell'approccio dell'amministrazione condivisa, a Bologna, in cui l'amministrazione comunale si dota di un regolamento comunale per la gestione condivisa dei beni comuni, dando l'avvio ad una stagione patrizia, giuridicamente inquadrata, nella gestione dei commons urbani (Arena, 1997 e 2006; Di Lascio, Giglioni, 2017). I due modelli appaiono differenti non solo e non tanto per le modalità

storiche di realizzazione o per il prevalere di una dimensione bottom-up o top-down di gestione dei commons urbani, ma anche per la differente natura e direzione delle esperienze concrete: più orientate ad una autonomia sociale e politica nel contesto napoletano, maggiormente riferite ad un quadro normativo definito inizialmente a Bologna. La individuazione di questi due riferimenti ideali, dunque, non si limita al contesto territoriale di prima affermazione, ma si basa sul prevalere di esperienze, pratiche e formati più orientati all'uso civico, da un lato, o maggiormente concentrati sul patto di gestione condivisa, dall'altro.

<sup>3</sup>In questo contributo si fa riferimento al termine centro antiviolenza, sebbene si debba precisare che alcune associazioni preferiscono adottare la dicitura casa delle donne, nella prospettiva di superare la neutralità del termine ed esplicitare che si tratta di luoghi di donne per le donne (Baeri Parisi 2016; Campani, Romanin 2015).

<sup>4</sup>L'empowerment è qui inteso come concetto multidimensionale e processuale, non solo un principio teorico, ma anche una pratica emancipatrice la cui azione si dispiega su molteplici livelli tra loro strettamente interrelati: intrapersonale/individuale (micro); interpersonale/relazionale e comunitario/

territoriale (meso); istituzionale/strutturale (macro). Le diverse concettualizzazioni di empowerment presenti in letteratura, ridefiniscono il concetto di potere, intendendolo sia come capacità di accedere e controllare le risorse a livello individuale, sia come capacità di agire trasformazioni strutturali a livello collettivo e sociale in una prospettiva di giustizia sociale redistributiva (Busi, Toffanin, Demurtas 2024). Con specifico riferimento alle donne vittime di violenza, l'empowerment è qui inteso come "un processo dinamico e continuo che mette in relazione i punti di forza individuali, le competenze e i comportamenti proattivi delle donne con le reali (e mutevoli) condizioni sociali e di altro tipo che devono affrontare, compreso l'impatto delle leggi e delle politiche sociali e le possibilità o gli impedimenti che esse creano per un cambiamento sociale trasformativo nella vita delle donne sopravvissute" (Magalhães et al. 2019, p. 165).

<sup>5</sup>Per una cronologia delle azioni che hanno animato i primi anni della Casa delle donne, si rimanda all'archivio online: <https://www.herstory.it/casa-della-donna>.

<sup>6</sup>Secondo quanto affermato da Creazzo (2008), i centri fondano infatti la loro strategia politica sulla la pratica della relazione tra donne, intesa come "una pratica politica che sposta, di fatto,

il simbolico dallo Stato, dalla legge, al materno e che ha trovato la sua elaborazione nel pensiero della differenza sessuale” (p. 23).

<sup>7</sup> In coerenza con la terminologia adottata nella letteratura femminista, il termine sopravvissuta (Kelly, 1998) è qui preferito a quello di vittima, nella prospettiva di porre l'accento sulla agency delle donne che vivono in una momentanea situazione di violenza (Dobash, Dobash, 1992), sottolineando quindi la loro capacità di intraprendere un percorso di autodeterminazione ed evitandone al contempo la stigmatizzazione, senza tuttavia sottostimare le difficoltà insite nel percorso del fuoriuscita dalla violenza (Stark 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Nel 2006 i centri riuniti in rete hanno scritto la Carta della rete nazionale dei Centri antiviolenza e delle Case delle donne e successivamente, nel 2008, “la rete si è data una formalizzazione giuridica con l'associazione D.i.Re. che ha portato al potenziamento non solo della forza e della visibilità dei nostri Centri ma anche della nostra identità comune” (Palladino 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Per un'analisi dell'evoluzione della strategia di prevenzione e contrasto alla violenza contro le donne si rimanda agli studi valutativi condotti dal CNR (IRPPS 2021b; 2023; 2024).

<sup>10</sup> Per le citazioni di questo paragrafo cfr. i testi contenuti in <https://luchaysiesta.org/la-casa/>.

<sup>11</sup> Il femminismo riconosce nelle pratiche comunitarie un lavoro di riflessione sulla riproduzione sociale, dunque, sulle relazioni socioeconomiche e di potere (cfr. Federici, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Per le citazioni di questo paragrafo cfr. i testi contenuti in <https://luchaysiesta.org/la-dichiarazione-di-autogoverno/> e la Dichiarazione di autogoverno di LyS (LyS, 2022).

<sup>13</sup> LyS contribuisce, con la sua pratica, all'analisi dei femminismi rispetto allo svelamento del lavoro di cura e riproduttivo, invisibile e non retribuito (o fortemente sottopagato), che viene svolto nell'ambito delle relazioni familiari e sociali. Tale analisi, e il lavoro di risignificazione che ne deriva, comporta l'emersione e la denuncia di un incalcolabile “debito di cura” accumulato dalle istituzioni, e quindi un credito di cui l'esistenza stessa di spazi come Lucha contribuisce (e deve contribuire) a esigere una restituzione.

<sup>14</sup> Il nome Lucha y Siesta si ispira alla tradizione zapatista, prendendo spunto dalla via in cui si trova, Lucio Sestio, le fondatrici, che erano state in Chiapas, hanno nominato lo spazio occupato in una sintesi perfetta del processo che si voleva costruire: lotta e riposo, azione e rigenerazione; su questo v. anche Fano Morrissey e Serughetti, 2024. Inoltre, è con l'occupazione zapatista del 1993, per protestare contro la legislazione che eliminava la proprietà comunale della terra in Messico, che il termine commons ha cominciato a circolare (cfr. Federici, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Lo spazio bianco viene inteso come quello spazio inatteso e di imprevedibile/necessario cambiamento. Esso è lo spazio del “desiderio, dell'improvvisazione, della sperimentazione, della siesta fertile”; non è un vuoto da attraversare ma occasione per dare forma a ciò che “ancora c'è da dire, nominare, pensare, scoprire, immaginare, sovvertire”.

<sup>16</sup> Come abbiamo visto in precedenza le donne protagoniste dell'8 marzo del 2008 venivano anche dal movimento per la casa, campo di azione tra i più consolidati a Roma (Cellamare, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Cfr. <https://www.comune.ra.it/aree-tematiche/volontariato-e-partecipazione/partecipazione/cittativa-centro-di-cittadinanza-attiva-del-comune-di-ravenna/i-patti-per-i-beni-comuni/i-patti-firmati/patto-di-collaborazione-per-la-gestione-e-la-realizzazione-delle-attivita-della-casa-delle-donne/>

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. <https://www.comune.livorno.it/articolo/centro-donna-ha-una-nuova-modalita-gestione-realizzata-atraverso-strumento-partecipazione>  
\* Le autrici e l'autore sono qui elencati in ordine alfabetico. Inoltre le autrici e l'autore hanno progettato e discusso insieme il presente contributo, redigendo in comune l'introduzione e le conclusioni. Per comodità redazionali, tuttavia, si segnala che Maria Cristina Antonucci ha redatto il par. 2, Pietro Demurtas

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# Tracking the social capital generated by commons through the ricochet effect

## A proposed theoretical framework for moving towards a caring city

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ricochet effect  
Montreal

Within Canadian federalism, the creation of cities and municipalities is the responsibility of the provinces, which have historically regulated them through a series of laws without constitutional recognition (Chiasson and Mévellec, 2014; Patsias and Prévost, 2022). In Quebec, however, an update of the Cities and Towns Act in 2017 increased the responsibilities assigned to or shared by Quebec municipalities by granting them non-constitutional status as local governments. This recognition has allowed towns to move away from a concept that initially limited them to the utilitarian function of maintaining and providing 'basic' services to their populations (e.g., drinking water and water treatment,

garbage collection, fire protection, road maintenance, and snow removal) (Breux and Mévellec, 2023). These municipalities have now been entrusted with new important responsibilities (Chiasson and Mévellec, 2014; Gouvernement du Québec, 2020; Breux and Mévellec, 2023). Although this is not unique to Quebec, they are encouraged to take responsibility and become au-

*To develop a caring ethic, cities need to engage with citizens to enhance the ways they live together. Commons are valuable allies for city governments in creating social capital that feeds common sense of belonging. They have a ricochet effect throughout the population. This relationship between the commons and their environment helps to create linking-type relationships (Putnam, 2000) with the city. By adding*

*the ricochet effect to the forms of social capital developed by Putnam, this article proposes an analytical framework to explain how commons can shape our cities into caring cities. The proposal's effectiveness is illustrated by two initiatives run by the Solon Collective in the Ahuntsic-Cartierville district of Montreal (Canada): LocoMotion and citizens protrusions.*

tonomous as a collective subject (Passalacqua and Celati, 2022). Quebec's major cities<sup>1</sup> have seized this opportunity to implement new approaches, policies and strategies that take care of themselves and their population, in the field of culture, social justice, resilience, food autonomy, civic participation, as well as the recovery of biodiversity (Durand Folco, 2017; Blanchette Vézina, 2021; Breux and Mévellec, 2023).

Institutions face challenges when maintaining or restoring public trust, and creating a sense of common purpose. Their ability to resonate with citizens remains limited in the face of narratives of corruption and governance practices that encourage cynicism and mistrust (Kanji and Tanahill, 2013; Patsias and Prévost, 2022). While the city government can implement policies and propose levers to care for its citizens, it can-

not succeed alone. It must work (Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy, 2013) with its citizens to assume the new responsibilities it has taken on, to increase a sense of care amongst its citizens, and to find democratic solutions to the complex problems facing humanity and nature (Tronto, 2013). Without waiting for government action, driven citizens are taking action by setting up collective and local initiatives. They create commons and collaborate to claim territories and provide local solutions to social and environmental issues in their communities (Durand-Folco, 2015; Euler, 2018; Tronto, 2013). The result is a shared ethos among the involved citizens, which tends to create collective social capital around the quest for emancipation, justice, and inclusion (Healey, 2018; Brain, 2019). This contribution posits that the social capital generated by commoning practices creates a ricochet effect, which inmakes our cities caring. The aim of this article is to propose an analytical framework that links these concepts, explaining what ricochet effect is and how it operates. Its measurement, when combined with social capital, testifies to the vitality and effects of the commons on their communities. By recognising this contribution of the commons, cities are contributing to the development of an ethic of care

that fosters a response to the multiple crises they face as caring cities.

The article is structured into three sections. The first explains and defines the concepts of the caring city, commons, and social capital. The article will highlight the essential role of citizens who form a common for the care ethic within the city, and will define the different types of relationships within social capital. Second, the ricochet effect is proposed as the fourth type of relationship associated with social capital. Third, the ricochet effect, also considering other forms of social capital, will be described, as well as how its presence can contribute to the common through creating links with the local government. The case of Solon Collective, an active common in the district of Ahuntsic-Cartierville, Montreal, is briefly presented through two initiatives led by Solon: LocoMotion and the sail-lies citoyennes.

### **The conceptual links between the commons' social capital and caring cities**

#### **The Caring City**

Tronto's concept of care offers a perspective that is not limited to issues of the invisibility of work and its predominant feminisation (Garrau and Le Goff, 2010 ; Tronto, 2013 ; Tronto and al., 2009). In fact, it goes beyond these boundaries to create tangible links between care and the importance of caring for our living environment and the beings that comprise it – with nature as

the foundation. Tronto and Fisher define care as a complex network linked to “species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (Tronto, 2013, p. 19). In this definition, Tronto identifies five processes of care, which could be summarised as follows:

- caring about – the awakening of an unmet need that needs to be addressed;
- caring for – the ensurance that the need is taken care of or addressed;
- care-giving – the act of caring, or care activity;
- care-receiving – the response generated by the care activity. It generally involves a judgment about the content and sufficiency of the care provided;
- caring with – the validation that the care activity conforms to established ethics and standards. This last stage, which can be adapted to suit various contexts, confirms that the care provided is in line with the desired vision of emancipation, democratization or social justice. (Tronto, 2013, p. 23).

The vision of a caring city could be rooted in the conception of ‘caring with’. Tronto allows us to rethink the world we live in through her ‘caring with’ contribution, while encouraging a shift towards actions that will have a positive impact on everyone’s well-being (Garrau and Le Goff, 2010). On the spectrum of the city, Tronto allows us to envisage the creation of an ethic of care which goes beyond the work of caring and en-

courages a new perception of the city governments' roles and responsibilities. A caring city therefore strives to reduce inequalities and increase social justice. It should adopt strategies that promote inclusivity (Marois, 2021) and civic engagement (Passalacqua and Celati, 2022). It embodies these principles in its design and form (Davis, 2022), in addition to the policies and strategies it adopts to meet the individual and collective aspirations and needs of its present and future inhabitants—all without forgetting the essential role that nature has to play in sustaining the well-being of all. By rethinking its design, processes, practices and services, the city seeks to embody a relational space conducive to debate, conflict resolution, mutual support, emancipation and well-being (Healey, 2018; Kussy, Palomera and Silver, 2023).

Evidently, the concept of a caring city is utopian, so this ideal cannot be fully achieved. Nevertheless, if city governments want to regain the trust of their citizens and demonstrate their ability to be genuine local governments that reflect the values and ideas of their citizens (Tronto, 2013; Beuret and Cadoret, 2015; Healey, 2018), they must work towards this ideal and develop an ethic of care. This requires the implementation of ambitious strategies, both internally and locally, that will bring about positive change for citizens. In doing so, these governments provide services and resources tailored to the needs of their citizens and support initiatives that generate common sense in their

territories, going well beyond simple awareness-raising campaigns. They can encourage the practice of governance based on discursive exchange. Like Healey (2018), it is believed that these spaces for discussion are essential to address the conflicts arising from the polarization of ideas, beliefs, ethics and values. In the absence of such spaces, which fall under the public authorities' mandate, citizens can demand them, or even develop initiatives or strategies to create them. Therefore, individuals regain their agency to act, to decide and to live together. By taking action, citizens give the city the assets it needs to become a caring city. In other words, it can restore the trust that citizens have in the democratic institution that it embodies, while supporting citizens' collective capacity to accept, embrace, contribute to and act on the collective future. This will enable institutions to develop initiatives to maintain, protect and care for their environment, their neighbourhoods and their city.

### **The Commons**

Although they often operate in the background, *commons* are one of the most promising initiatives for creating a sense of community. They bring together citizens who are actively involved in their local areas. Commons allow them to unite around a common theme, a connecting object. Long studied as a way of managing resources that oppose private property and free use, commons first gained notoriety through

the work of Elinor Ostrom (1990). Over time, researchers have developed the concept to reflect the social importance of commons and their transformative potential. Whether natural (Ostrom, 1990) or urban (Huron, 2015; Mehan and Mehan, 2022), they are generally defined as an alternative to capital that requires the presence of three elements: a community that collectively determines the rules of its governance for the care, use and development of a resource –whether tangible or not (De Angelis, 2017; Bollier, Helfrich and Petitjean, 2022; Furukawa Marques and Durand Folco, 2023). This makes each common unique, as they operate according to different rules, in different contexts, and around different resources. It is therefore not unusual for citizens to come together and form commons around heritage features (Beaudet, 2014), wastelands to be protected (Chénier and Bélanger, 2023), public squares, community gardens and even landscapes (Foster, 2013). However, in an urban context, collaboration is made more difficult by the prevailing capitalist context, the difficulty of collectively re-appropriating a resource to create commons, and the idea of collaborating with people who could be seen as strangers (Huron, 2015; Micciarelli, 2022). The survival of commons therefore depends on a political principle of coobligation (Dardot and Laval, 2014, p. 23) if they are to stand the test of time. The commoners involved will have to show solidarity in the face of adversity encountered in both the creation and the

operation of the commons. In particular, they will have to share care tasks and ensure that the decisions, rules and sanctions adopted jointly are respected.

As a result, commons are inseparable from their *commoning* practices. Euler defines commoning as a set of activities organised between commoners voluntarily and inclusively, promoting mediation by and for peers. Commoning intends to satisfy the real individual and collective needs, not to satisfy the desire for accumulation (2018, p. 12). Thus, the production and reproduction (or *produsage*) of actions are supported by rules that the community organizes around both the common and the community itself, as well as their capacities and needs. Commoning aims to care for the community so that it can meet both the present and future needs of said community. This aim goes hand in hand with caring cities' desire to be 'future oriented' (Davis, 2022). However, the rules that ensure the proper use of commons and commoning practices will be created according to principles of self-organisation and self-determination. As such, commons are more than a response to individual needs; the commons become a collective action to lay claim to the city. They promote social practices based on mutual respect and trust, making the sustainability of the commons a shared responsibility. Commoning promotes mutual aid, reciprocity, participation and inclusion. These are the essential and foundational pillars that enable us to act, decide

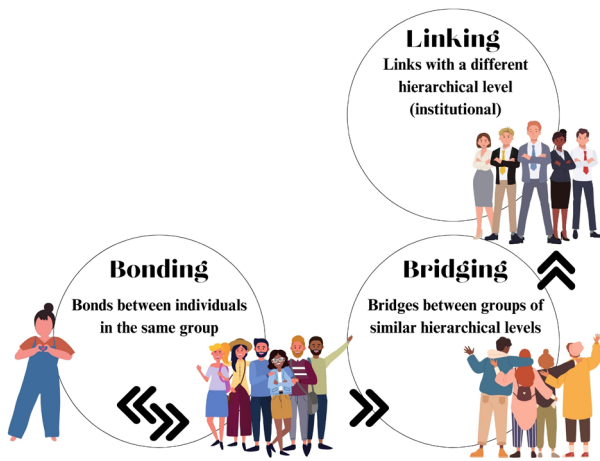
and interact in common (Bollier, Helfrich and Petitjean, 2022). All these characteristics mean that citizens who act collectively adopt an ethic of care (Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020), replicating everyday practices that foster a sense of belonging to the community. These practices are a response that contributes to making the city a better place to cohabitate. They concretise the idea of an ethic of care at the local level. Moreover, they enable social capital to form, impacting both the individual and organisational levels to benefit citizens and their environments.

### **The Social Capital**

Social capital refers to the personal links and relationships that an individual or organisation can mobilise to obtain benefits that serve both individual and collective purposes. Its usefulness can be varied, ranging from simple influence to the acquisition of tangible benefits. We owe this concept to Alexis de Tocqueville, who, in 1830, used it to explain what led groups of citizens to become civically and politically involved in the United States. Social capital was later taken up by Bourdieu to explain its effects and causes on social class disparities; Coleman then used it to highlight its effects on public action (Ech-Chahed, 2022). However, it was Putnam (2000) who highlighted the three forms of social capital: *bonding*, *bridging* and *linking*, allowing a better understanding of the interweaving links that arise from relationships at different levels. For example, the relation-

ships that an individual builds through a collective can manifest within the collective or extend beyond its boundaries. When an individual develops links with members of the collective with whom he or she shares similarities, it is referred to as a bonding relationship. On the other hand, when an individual or collective maintains relationships with a collective or individuals that differ from them, but still share similarities at a hierarchical level, it is referred to as bridging (Fig. 1). However, these networks must have the peculiarity of maintaining horizontal relations and therefore, a similar level of influence, hierarchisation or action (Baylis, Gong and Wang, 2018; Perras and Normandin, 2019; Safarzynska and Sylwestrzak, 2023). Conversely, when there is a connection between networks that do not belong to similar economic, ideological, social, cultural or political levels, Putnam describes these connections as vertical and uses the term linking. (2000).

These forms of social capital help us better understand the impact of commons and commoning. For instance, through commoning practices, an individual who joins a common will develop bonding relationships with the other members of the common. The common, as a collective, will be able to develop bridges with other commons at similar levels. These 'inter-common' links are called bridging. Several authors have shown that individuals are better able to satisfy their personal interests in bonding and bridging relationships (Ech-Chahed, 2022; Safarzyn-



**Interrelationships between the three different forms of social capital**

Fig.1

Adapted from Perras & Normandin (2019, p.7)

ska and Sylwestrzak, 2023). In order to develop linking-type connections more easily – and perhaps hope to have a systemic impact – existing models show that commons need to coalesce (De Angelis, 2017; Perras and Normandin, 2019; Ech-Chahed, 2022). Thus, in the context of a caring city, it would be easier for commons to maintain relations with their local government. These commons will then be in a better position to influence the development of policies or the deployment of certain actions that are favourable to them (Perras and Normandin, 2019, p. 11) and their community’s goals. I will return to this aspect later.

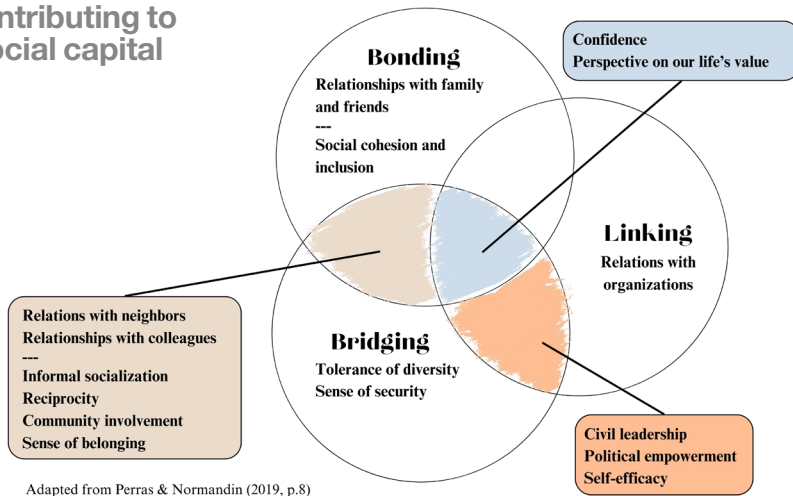
Incidentally, social capital can be observed and even measured (Putnam, 2000; Baylis, Gong and Wang, 2018; Brain, 2019; Perras and Normandin, 2019; Safarzynska and Sylwestrzak, 2023). Where Perras and Normandin identify sixteen factors that contribute to social capital, at both an individual and collective level (2019, p. 9), it is considered more efficient to count twelve of them, which materialize through four

different forms of relationships (Fig. 2). Perras and Normandin (2019, p. 8) point out that these factors can be linked to the different forms of social capital proposed by Putnam. This distinction and illustration allow us to distinguish between social capital derived from individual relationships and that derive at a collective level. For example, bonding relationships can be observed within a family or a group of friends. The same type of relationship can also be observed at a collective level, as exemplified by neighbours or colleagues. In the first case, social cohesion and inclusivity contribute to bonding. This may or may not explain why it is easy to join a new group: more attention needs to be paid to the integration of new members (Baylis, Gong and Wang, 2018; Perras and Normandin, 2019). Additionally, informal socialisation and associative involvement contribute to both bonding and bridging, through which a sense of belonging and reciprocal practices emerges. Bridging interactions are more likely to be observed in the context of relationships between neighbours or colleagues. Tolerance of diversity and a sense



# Factors contributing to forms of social capital

Fig.2



of security contribute specifically to this form of social capital. For example, we can observe bonding in relationships between members of the same subcommittee, and bridging in relationships between colleagues on said subcommittee and members of other subcommittees within the same group. In both cases, the factors specific to bonding and bridging will reveal strengths or weaknesses in the relationships when prompted. These intensities may vary according to the contexts and actions undertaken by the commoners (Baylis, Gong and Wang, 2018; Safarzynska and Sylwestrzak, 2023). Finally, the monitoring of linking relationships requires the creation of relationships with organisations or institutions at another hierarchical level. It is interesting to note that no single factor contributes to both bonding and linking. In fact, the factors that contribute to linking also seem to have an effect on bridging. This is the case for civic leadership, political empowerment and a sentiment of individual or collective self-efficacy. However, both trust and the perceived the value of one's existence influence all

forms of social capital (Fig.2). Indeed, Putnam describes the presence of trust as essential for facilitating coordination and cooperation within a group (Putnam, 2000; Ech-Chahed, 2022).

While we can see how an application of the above-discussed social capital might extend to commons in the city, its current definition is limited. Within the city, commoners transform their environment by caring for it and practising commoning in a way that makes sense to them. In doing so, they generate social capital that benefits both commoners and their partners, whether or not they are on the same hierarchical level. However, to fully understand how social capital links commons and the city, it is necessary to explore how it evolves through invisible links between commons and the rest of the population. When the changes that commoners make to its environment are visible, invisible links' formation can be observed. These links contribute to the creation of linking between the community and its city at a collective level. To fully comprehend the role of social

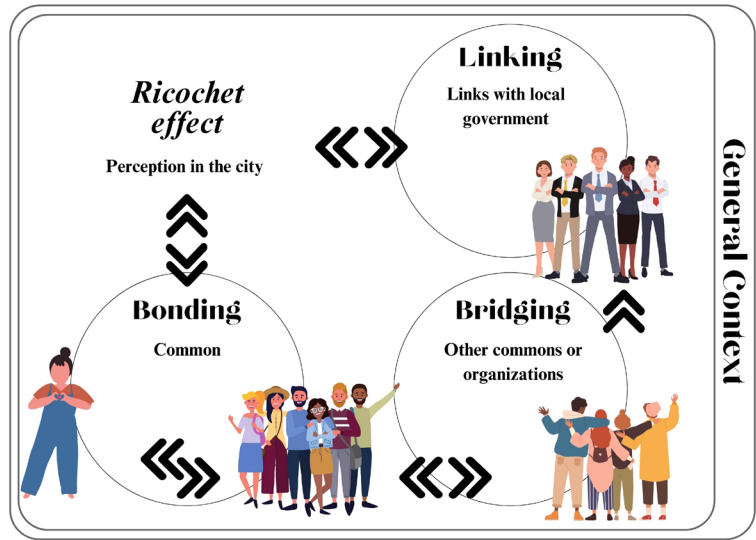
capital in this context, a fourth element is proposed to explain the relationships of the commons through the prism of theories of caring in the city: the *ricochet* effect.

### **After bonding, bridging and linking: the *ricochet* effect**

Social capital makes it possible to understand both the types of relationships that exist within a collective and the factors that influence them. This information is invaluable if it is known by organisations and communities. In fact, it makes it possible to inform and change the practices adopted within the collective, depending on the strength or weakness of the factors and forms of the targeted relationships. This is what several authors have called collective effectiveness (Brain, 2019). For example, a community with a low level of bridging could set up informal socialization activities alongside a project involving its own community and that of another community. In doing so, the two organisations would work on tolerating diversity, fostering a sense of security, helping to develop inclusivity and a sense of belonging between the two groups, and generally improving their social capital.

Putnam has been highly influential in recent literature pertaining to the effects of social capital on the management of pooled resources and commoning, such as research conducted by Baylis, Gong and Wang (2018), as well as Safarzynska and Sylwestrzak (2023). These authors

have argued that bridging can contribute to a diminished sense of commonality. This is the case when a common establishes new relationships with other commons. These relationships become new alternatives for meeting the needs of commoners. As they become less active in commoning practices, commoners will see their sense of belonging diminish. Thus, commons with strong bonding but weak bridging would perform better (Baylis, Gong and Wang, 2018). Researchers have also shown that the precariousness of commons and commoners affects compliance with governance rules and propensity to cooperate (Baylis, Gong and Wang, 2018; Safarzynska and Sylwestrzak, 2023). This precariousness has the effect of reducing bonding within the group. However, in the case of bridging relationships, selfish and individualistic behaviour is reduced when the quality of commons is comparable, thereby making it easier to develop reciprocity and mutual aid (Safarzynska and Sylwestrzak, 2023). However, these studies focus mainly on bonding and bridging relationships. Very little work has been done on the factors that encourage the creation of direct links between communities and institutions. Yet, the creation of these links is necessary for many commons that wish to contribute to the well-being of people and nature by establishing transformative practices in favour of the socio-ecological transition. It is not unusual for these commons' actions to take place in public spaces or for them to claim the reappropriation



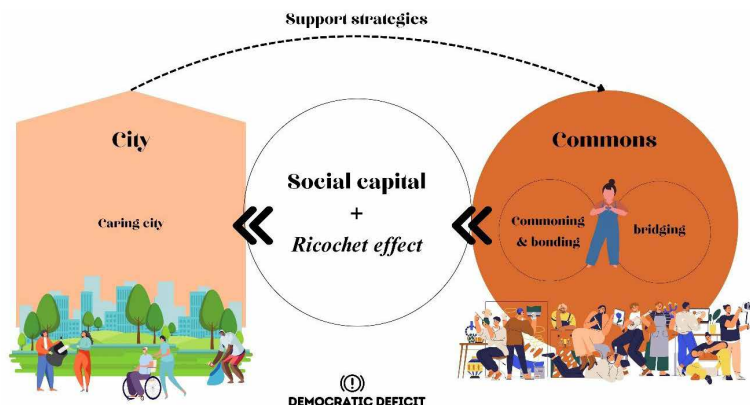
**Incorporating the ricochet effect into social capital**

Fig.3

of public goods. In such cases, the commons need to obtain, or at least secure political support if they are to respond sustainably to their own needs and intentions.

According to the existing literature and the models presented above (Fig. 1-2), if a community develops a network to demonstrate its relevance and capacity to act, it is more likely to develop an alliance with the city government (Perras and Normandin, 2019; Ech-Chahed, 2022; Micciarelli, 2022; Safarzynska and Sylwestrzak, 2023). This allows it to assert its value and build a relationship of trust, whether with this network or with the so-called hierarchically superior actors. However, if the community wishes to establish direct links without relying on bridging, it will have to explore other avenues. Among these, measuring a community's ricochet effect in its environment may be an interesting approach (Fig. 3). It is important to distinguish the ricochet effect from col-

lective effectiveness. While the latter is directly linked to the organisation's activities and its impact on its members and beneficiaries, the ricochet effect is more latent. It could be defined as an indirect effect of the activities of the community, as perceived by a population for whom it is not necessarily intended. Although he uses it from a legal perspective, Jeuland notes that a ricochet establishes links between different concepts and that it can serve as a method for exploring social relations, whether between beings or with objects (2009). Nevertheless, on the spectrum of the city, the ricochet effect is part of a general context with specific social, economic, political, environmental and geographical characteristics. To illustrate this effect, here is a simple example: you are on a train and two people are having a friendly conversation about a seemingly innocuous topic. Suddenly, one of them bursts out laughing while the other continues the conversation in a joking tone. If you start to smile too, you have just ex-



## Model for articulating the social capital of the commons in a caring city

Fig.4

perceived a ricochet effect at a local and individual level. In the context of collective action, a ricochet effect is part of a desire for social change and can be perceived positively or negatively depending on the context and the impact it has on its environment. Whether positive or negative, this collective action will generate reactions and opinions from a community outside the collective for which the action was originally intended. These reactions will then influence the community surrounding the collective, helping to create a favourable context for bonding and bridging within the collective – particularly by facilitating the recruitment or involvement of new citizens, or the desire for association between collectives with a similar vision. If the general public's perception is overwhelmingly positive, it will have an exceptionally favourable effect on the creation of links, thus enabling the creation of direct links between the collective and hierarchically superior organizations, without the need for the collective to join forces.

If strong social capital is beneficial to the well-being of communities (Perras and Normandin, 2019, p. 11), the addition of the ricochet effect amplifies this contribution and should be monitored (Igras and al., 2021). Knowing its full content makes the ricochet effect a powerful argument for the collectives that use it. It makes it possible to highlight the relevance of the collective's impacts, not only within the community itself or the organisations with which it has relationships, but also at the operational level of the general population and local governments. By making its social capital and ricochet effects visible, a community can demonstrate its relevance and contribution to a neighbourhood, district, or city, and develop linkages. In doing so, it benefits from greater recognition from funders in its ability to govern itself (Ostrom, 1990). These collectives develop direct relationships based on trust, thereby influencing and proposing strategies to support commons, or contribute to developing public policies that

are potentially beneficial to them. These support strategies enable commons to increase their collective effectiveness and thus have a greater anticipated ripple effect on the population (Perras and Normandin, 2019). The development of doing, deciding, and living together is then made possible. As this phenomenon grows, it will go beyond the personal accumulation of resources or the simple friendship that characterises a bond (Brain, 2019, p. 174). Thanks to its knowledge of its social capital and its ricochet effect, the community is able to increase its capacity to act in the city. It thus helps generalize the implementation of an ethic of care across the territory and increases confidence in the city as a government of proximity (Fig. 4).

Whether through bonding or bridging, commons have an effect on the population that creates an invisible relationship: a ricochet effect. When this effect is perceived positively, it adds to the created social capital, anchoring it in the city and enhancing the latter's overall well-being. These effects, if measured, can be captured by the city or can help create or consolidate relationships with the community. If the city deploys strategies to support commons in their practices, the social capital and ricochet effect generated by commons will increase, forming a virtuous circle that will increase the ethic of care in the city. The collaborations and synergies thus created will restore trust in the city, which will also enable it to reduce its democratic deficit as a local government. On the other hand,

without support for the commons, the city will not be able to join forces with the driving forces of social change in its area, and nurture the process of doing, deciding and living together.

### **The *ricochet* effect illustrated in the Ahuntsic-Cartierville borough in Montreal**

To illustrate the utility of this framework, two projects involving the Solon Collective were examined. Legally constituted as a non-profit organisation, Solon was set up in 2009 by a group of neighbours who wanted to facilitate action-taking to support socio-ecological transitions. In April 2020, after launching a number of promising projects in its borough, Rosemont-Petite-Patrie, the group extended its activities to the borough of Ahuntsic-Cartierville<sup>2</sup>. Over the years, Solon's self-managed governance has enabled several initiatives to be set up by and for local residents (Solon Collectif, 2020). Such is the case with LocoMotion (Solon Collectif, 2023b, 2023a). In March 2024, LocoMotion became an autonomous Solon community, sharing bikes, trailers and cars aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the number of cars on the roads. It did not take long for residents of the Ahuntsic-Cartierville borough to see trailer bikes and cargo bikes in the LocoMotion colours appear in the neighbourhood streets. Based on observations and anecdotal exchanges within the community, this research project has found that many residents use these shared vehicles to take their children



Photos from left to right (1 to 4): Happy citizens on bikes ; Shared-access trailer on a citizen's property; Trailer parking on sidewalk; Locomotion bikes lockers in a borough park.  
 Photo credits : 1. Audrey MacMahon (2022); 2. Marie-Anne Perreault (2023); 3. Solon Collectif (2023); 4. Marie-Anne Perreault (2024)



Photos from left to right (5 to 8) : Four civic protrusions in the streets of the borough Ahuntsic-Cartierville, Montréal, Canada  
 Photo credits : 5. Ahuncycle (2023), 6. Comité citoyen Youville (2023); 7. Marie-Anne Perreault (2024); 8. Comité citoyen Youville (2023).

to school, deliver food to local organizations, or simply do their shopping. Without necessarily taking part in the common, many residents have changed their lifestyles to include public or active transport, demonstrating the positive impact this initiative has had on the neighbourhood. Many residents have not yet joined the scheme but are positive about this new way of getting around our streets. I am one of them. The positive ricochet effect has attracted the attention of the borough's elected representatives and civil servants and increased their collaboration with Solon. So, while the first shared bikes and trailers were stored on the land and in the homes of residents involved in the project, relations with the Ahuntsic-Cartierville borough have enabled Solon to gain access to public property (Fig. 1-4); it. It is no longer unusual

to see trailers or bicycles made available to residents from parks or pavements. Some structures have even had to be adapted by the city to facilitate access. By making LocoMotion's actions visible to the population and demonstrating an active social capital within its commons, Solon has created a ripple effect in the neighbourhood. This positive effect has encouraged the borough's elected representatives and civil servants to work with the community and implement strategies that are firmly rooted in the urban landscape. In this way, the city demonstrates its support not only for LocoMotion, but also for initiatives that encourage sharing, solidarity and togetherness – essential elements of a caring city. The trust built up between the municipality and the Solon Collective has also led to oth-

er projects. The case of the *saillies citoyennes* (citizens curbstone – Fig. 5-8) is an example of this. This project was set up in partnership with the Ahuntsic-Cartierville community on the initiative of Solon and two local citizens' groups: the Ahuntsic-Cartierville Active Mobility Association and the Ahuntsic-Cartierville Environmental Mobilization. These community groups predate Solon's arrival in the community. They sought to address mobility and road safety issues in the area. While the municipality's budget and administrative procedures limited the use of curbstone extensions in areas identified by residents as problematic, Solon facilitated collaboration between residents and the city so that solutions could be heard and developed to reduce vehicle speeds and make intersections on busy roads safer. This collaboration enabled the rapid installation of vegetated citizen projections for a fraction of the price during the summer of 2023 (Maison de l'innovation sociale, Arpent and Solon Collectif, 2023; Solon Collectif, 2023c). These changes in urban design have been welcomed by residents, who can use these structures to rest while walking, to enjoy a sheltered area while crossing an intersection, or to see the speed reduced on their streets on a daily basis. It has created a positive ricochet effect, evidenced by the many positive comments posted on social networks in the neighbourhood. The enthusiasm shown by the public following this pilot project's roll-out reinforces the feeling of belonging and the safety of citizens in

their living environment. Many residents would like to see other citizens' protrusions set up near their parks and schools before the borough installs a permanent structure.

This project shows residents that by coming together as a community, they can address issues that affect them, improve their living environment and work hand in hand with their city, thereby strengthening their sense of belonging and confidence in the city. However, many residents are unaware that these curbstones are the result of their neighbours' initiative, and that they were made possible through a collaborative ecosystem (Micciarelli, 2022). Nevertheless, a positive ricochet effect emerged from it, which, when added to the social capital generated by the parties involved in this project, can be mobilised by elected officials and civil servants to improve services across the spectrum of the city. Although these measures have not yet been announced by the municipal representatives, they should take concrete form in two ways: through more support strategies (e.g., funding, access to materials or expertise) or a review of the city's internal processes to facilitate the creation of projects in collaboration with citizens' groups and commons in the future. Of course, it is still too early to assess the choices that the municipality will make following the deployment of citizens' initiatives on its territory, but these two tactics will lead to a strengthening of the care ethic to improve the way we do, decide and live together.

## Conclusion

By generating social capital that has a ricochet effect in the city, commons can have an impact on their living environment. This impact can be perceived positively by the population and institutions that occupy the same urban areas. If the ricochet effect is perceived positively, these commons can create a favourable context of nurturing initiatives, intentions and demands on institutions in positions of authority. The commitment of commoners increases participation within the community, nurtures bonding relationships, and provides opportunities for bridging and consolidating links with local governments. The social capital creates a virtuous circle that helps foster an ethic of care within the city for its inhabitants and the surrounding natural environment. Of course, this positive ricochet effect remains closely linked to a political, social and economic context that is favourable to the commons, the involvement of citizens in collective initiatives and the search for a generalised ethic of care within the city.

Nevertheless, if they are to retain their collective effectiveness and maintain high levels of participation and civic leadership, commons must remain vigilant against the erosion of links between commoners to the detriment of other organizations. If such an erosion of participation were to occur, it would be necessary to review the cooperation within the community to strengthen the sense of belonging and the bond between commoners. The introduction of

such rules will be to the detriment of bridging. However, the intention is to maintain the ricochet effect of the community and its link with the institutions.

By structuring the analysis around a combination of the concepts of commons, social capital and the caring city, it has been possible to explore how social capital can enhance commons and the commoning they generate as a means of extending the reach of a city that aspires to be a caring city. In doing so, it has been demonstrated that by monitoring their social capital and the ricochet effect, commons can establish themselves as allies of local authorities and build collaborative relationships with the latter. Commons become guarantors of shared intentions by seeking to establish an ethic of caring that promotes the long-term well-being of people and nature.

Nevertheless, the proposed analytical framework needs to be further tested by researchers to explore its potential in an urban context in Quebec. Further case studies are also needed to adapt this proposal to other policies and regulatory contexts. Finally, other factors that may influence the occurrence of the ricochet effect or linking can be identified and documented in relation to urban commons. Understanding their impact on the ability of commons to persist over time, maintain community bonding, and expand a network of commons is essential. With the support of city governments, commons will be able to create a context conducive to solidar-



ity, mutual aid and sharing within social practices between citizens, thereby helping to increase care. There will be a greater ricochet effect felt by the population as a whole, leading to greater citizen involvement to promote collective action and coexistence. Both cities and commons will be able to benefit from such. Cities, as local authorities, will not be solely responsible for creating a sense of community; the caring city will become a shared responsibility of all citizens.

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## Note

<sup>1</sup> According to the report *L'organisation municipale au Québec en 2020*, the ten largest cities in Quebec are Montreal, Quebec City, Laval, Longueuil, Gatineau, Terrebonne, Trois-Rivières, Sherbrooke, Lévis and Saguenay. They represent more than 47% of Quebec's population and 55% of employment (Gouvernement du Québec, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Montreal is the French-speaking metropolis of Canada. It has nineteen boroughs, each represented by a borough mayor. Each of these boroughs is divided into electoral wards, each of which has a city councillor. All are elected by universal suffrage by the citizens of the district, which is given a budget and responsibilities by the Ville-Centre. While Ro-

semont-Petite-Patrie is located in the heart of the island of Montreal, the borough of Ahuntsic-Cartierville is in the north of the island. It is made up of four constituencies (Bordeaux-Cartierville, Ahuntsic, Saint-Sulpice and Sault-au-Récollet) and eleven historic neighbourhoods. Ahuntsic-Cartierville is also the author's borough.

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# Costruire un'infrastruttura di cura

## Il ruolo del progetto nel ripensare pratiche di comunità e spazi collettivi: il caso del Collectif Etc.

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### Introduzione

L'articolo esplora l'intersezione tra processi di *commoning* e la costruzione di infrastrutture di cura in contesti marginali, che si presentano come occasione per riconsiderare il ruolo del progetto architettonico e urbanistico nella definizione di una diversa narrazione delle dinamiche territoriali contemporanee che investono queste aree. L'intreccio tra *care* e *commons* offre, infatti, una prospettiva che trascende il concetto di assistenza alla persona, per abbracciare una visione più ampia e profonda della cura intesa come forma di resistenza e di rivendicazione delle comunità locali. Attraverso la letteratura neofemminista, possiamo mettere in luce questa dimensione, evidenziando come la cura non sia semplicemente una pratica individuale, familistica, o solamente riservata alla sfera femminile (Federici, 2007), ma piuttosto abbia bisogno di essere rivendicata come un'azione collettiva, come un processo costante, quotidiano, perma-

*This paper is part of a broader debate on the role of urban and architectural project within the growing attention towards processes of spatial regeneration in marginal areas, which places practices of care and spatial re-signification at the center as an element of collective action outside of neoliberal dictates.*

*Starting from the empirical observation of the 'failed' project La Places des Possibles, in France - with the Collectif Etc involved, intertwining design experience and the redefinition of a collective identity - it is possible to deduce some more general elements of*

*reflection regarding the role of the designer and of the space within the commoning processes. How is design practice redefined within actions that focus on a different way of doing things, different from the productivist model where urban design has been placed in recent decades? What is the role of space as a medium of negotiation within a collective process that evolves with slow and uncertain times and modes?*

nente di mantenimento del territorio e dei suoi caratteri ambientali, che va al di là della mera logica estrattivista del suolo ai fini produttivi (Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999). Allineandosi con questa interpretazione del *care* volta a promuovere una nuova concezione di spazio e di relazione basata su valori come l'inclusività, mutualismo e cura reciproca, i contesti extra-urbani emergono come luoghi preferenziali di tale relazione, dove nasce la possibilità di un progetto che si distacchi dal paradigma neoliberale.

La contaminazione tra la letteratura femminista sul *care* e il dibattito interno ai processi di *commoning* ci permette dunque di mettere in evidenza almeno tre aspetti fondamentali per il ripensamento dei territori marginali: da un lato il ruolo centrale delle azioni riproduttive (caratterizzate da azioni di cura, di mantenimento quotidiano, azioni domestiche insite nella tradizione locale) come pratiche collettive (e non individuali, da limitare allo spazio intimo e pri-

vato); e ancora il ruolo di queste azioni come occasioni di rivendicazione di un diverso valore del territorio rispetto alle logiche produttiviste tipiche del sistema neoliberale; infine, il principio di cooperazione e responsabilità reciproca dell'agire, non come raggruppamento di persone unite da interessi esclusivi, ma come occasione per definire processi collettivi di autogoverno.

All'interno di questa cornice, il testo nasce dall'occasione di rilettura di un caso empirico, il progetto 'mancato' *La Place des Possibles* a Saint-Laurent-en-Royans, in Francia. Collocato nella Valle della Drome all'interno di un'ex-fabbrica di tessuti, è il risultato del percorso collettivo di costruzione di un hub socio-culturale, un *tier-lieu* in grado di affermarsi come nuovo polo di riferimento all'interno di un territorio caratterizzato da policentrismo e dispersione insediativa. Un percorso di co-progettazione avviato nel 2017 da alcune associazioni e durato sei anni, durante i quali i diversi soggetti coinvolti hanno sperimentato eventi di coinvolgimento della comunità locale, laboratori di progettazione partecipata, modelli di governance della struttura e gestione coordinata e condivisa degli spazi. Una sperimentazione avvenuta con tempi lunghi e all'interno della quale il contributo del *Collectif Etc* - collettivo di architetti da sempre

impegnato nella costruzione di *tiers-lieux* in diversi contesti francesi – muove il progetto verso una forma di ‘cantiere infinito’, dove sapere, agire professionale e coinvolgimento sociale diventano elementi inscindibili per la continua messa in discussione del progetto stesso. All’interno di questa cornice, il presente contributo vuole indagare gli elementi di valore e replicabilità, ma anche le fragilità intrinseche che ne hanno determinato il fallimento.

A partire da questa ipotesi, il testo si articola in tre parti: la prima dedicata a delineare il concetto di ‘cura’ e le molteplici sfaccettature che questo assume all’interno delle dinamiche di *commoning* in contesti extraurbani come quello della Valle della Drome; si rileggono le pratiche di cura come processi collettivi che coinvolgono le comunità locali nel preservare, proteggere e valorizzare le risorse territoriali e ambientali, evidenziando il ruolo del progetto nella costruzione di possibili scenari di sviluppo sociale e territoriale. La seconda parte si struttura intorno alla descrizione del progetto *La Place des Possibles*, e in particolare del ruolo del *Collectif Etc* nella definizione del progetto spaziale e del processo di governance della ex fabbrica. Attraverso l’esplorazione delle strategie e delle azioni intraprese dal collettivo, emerge chiaramente la collaborazione attiva tra architetti, associazioni e comunità locale nello sviluppo di progetti che rispecchino le necessità e le aspirazioni del luogo specifico. Inoltre, viene analizzata la dimensione di fallimento e il suo ruolo all’interno del processo,

considerato come un passaggio di scoperta e apprendimento fondamentale nelle pratiche progettuali.

Infine, una terza sezione è dedicata alla riflessione attorno all’intersezione tra cura, pratiche di *commoning* e progetto di spazi da riattivare in contesti marginali.

### **Care e Commons in contesti marginali**

Da tempo, i territori rurali sono soggetti a ideologie che ne ridefiniscono costantemente forme e significati, influenzati da politiche che spesso promuovono una visione antitetica rispetto alla città, determinando così il senso sia della vita rurale che di quella urbana. Queste narrazioni tendono a esaltare o demonizzare a turno una delle due realtà, creando così dinamiche complesse di interazione e contrasto (Koolhaas, 2021). Già nel 1970, nell’ormai rinomato libro *La rivoluzione urbana* – recentemente reinterpretato e reso attuale da Brenner (2014; 2016) – Lefebvre esorta a prestare attenzione a quel “campo cieco” (Lefebvre, 1973, p.41) dove si stavano delineando i tratti di una maniera nuova di abitare il tempo e lo spazio, non riducibile a quelle opposizioni dicotomiche città/campagna, centro/periferia con cui siamo stati abituati a ordinare universalmente il mondo.

La pandemia da COVID-19 in questo senso ha funzionato come acceleratore, imponendo un ripensamento dei termini in cui eravamo soliti pensare e descrivere i territori e mettendo l’accento sulla necessità di tornare alle “pratiche, i



valori e le domande dell'abitare" (Tarpino, 2020). In questo senso, i processi di *commoning*, diventano una prospettiva interessante attraverso cui declinare e cercare di definire nuove narrazioni, rimettendo in discussione alcune delle precedenti dicotomie.

Se osservate attraverso questa lente, le aree marginali oggi appaiono interessate da significative trasformazioni: si tratta di mutamenti 'minimi', non del tutto manifesti e tanto meno misurabili, a volte ambigui, su cui vale la pena concentrarsi per comprendere in che modo processi di *commoning* possono portare a un diverso sistema di valori, almeno in questi territori. Tale prospettiva, ispirata dalla letteratura neofemminista, adotta un'ottica di resistenza e rivendicazione, mettendo in luce valori altri rispetto a quelli riconosciuti dal sistema neolibérale nella città.

Ricorrendo a queste lenti di lettura, oggi è possibile osservare in contesti rurali, spesso associati a condizioni di marginalità e fragilità, la presenza di forze creative e generative capaci di riempire in modi innovativi gli spazi vuoti (Carrosio, 2019; Tantillo, 2023; Varotto, 2021) e silenziosi che caratterizzano tali territori, definiti da una ricca storia e da un grande valore dal punto di vista ambientale e paesaggistico (Maciocco, 2011). Per affrontare le problematiche economiche e i mutamenti sociali che le influenzano, recentemente si stanno sviluppando nuovi ecosistemi nel tentativo di preservare le specificità locali e trovare forme innovative di rinascita.

In questo contesto emergono spazi ibridi, condivisi, laboratori di sperimentazione, luoghi dove gli abitanti si uniscono per co-plasmare servizi in modo creativo prendendosi cura degli spazi abbandonati.

Il concetto di *urban common* assume quindi una nuova rilevanza anche in contesti marginali di questo tipo<sup>1</sup>, segnando un interessante cambiamento di prospettiva rispetto alla sua tradizionale centralità in ambienti fortemente urbanizzati. Tale fenomeno evidenzia una trasformazione significativa sia in termini di competenze coinvolte, sia di valori fondamentali come inclusività, mutualismo e cura. In questo senso inizia quindi a presentarsi una marginalità da intendersi non come luogo di privazione, ma al contrario come luogo in cui plasmare possibilità radicali e spazi di resistenza. Una marginalità che Bell Hooks definisce "spazialmente strategica per la produzione di un discorso controegemonico [...] un luogo capace di offrirci la possibilità di una prospettiva radicale da cui guardare, creare, immaginare alternative nuovi mondi" (Hooks, 2020, p. 128).

### **Il Collectif Etc e il progetto per La Place des Possibles**

Nel 1989 Ray Oldenburg, nel libro *The great good place*, conia il termine "third places", riferito a spazi che nomina così per distinguerli dall'abitazione/casa (primi) e dal luogo del lavoro (secondi), intendendo mettere l'accento piuttosto su quegli *spazi altri* come bar, ristoranti, cinema,



## La Place des Possibles, Saint-Laurent-en-Royans, Francia. Dall'abbandono alla riconversione, attraverso un'esperienza progettuale e di ridefinizione di un'identità

Foto: <http://www.collectifetc.com/realisation/la-place-des-possibles/>

Fig.1

luoghi commerciali, biblioteche, centri religiosi, centri sportivi, parchi; *spazi terzi*, aperti, collettivi, fondamentali per lo sviluppo democratico della società, per capacità di inclusione di una comunità e il rafforzamento del senso di appartenenza locale che questa genera.

Nel contesto francese, il concetto di “tiers-lieux” – che oggi si traduce anche in una politica a scala nazionale<sup>2</sup> – si amplia e complessifica mettendo al centro il concetto di luogo per evidenziare il ruolo relazionale dello spazio, piuttosto che la sua dimensione fisica, producendo una serie consistente di sperimentazioni in tal senso. Si tratta di ‘fabbriche di prossimità’, aperte e comunitarie, veri e propri motori di sviluppo economico-sociale e rigenerazione locale. Sono localizzati nelle grandi città, ma sempre più anche nei territori extra-urbani – aree ex industriali, zone rurali e montane – in cui diventano elemento fondamentale di innesco di processi di

cambiamento. I modelli relazionali, economici e politici che si rintracciano sono eterogenei, ma al contempo raccontano di una capacità imprenditoriale e collaborativa della società locale nel generare comunità.

In questo senso, appare rilevante osservare alcuni casi emblematici, come ad esempio i lavori di *YesWeCamp*<sup>3</sup>, un'associazione che opera sostenendo l'uso creativo e innovativo di spazi dismessi, permettendo alle comunità di diventare ‘co-produttori locali’ attraverso la messa in rete di spazi disponibili e le relative richieste d'uso da parte di enti pubblici o privati; altra pratica interessante analoga alla precedente è quella del gruppo *Villages Vivants*<sup>4</sup>, che da anni si concentra sull'inserimento di imprese sociali nei territori extra-urbani e la conseguente rivitalizzazione di villaggi in via di spopolamento. E ancora, *Le Chalutier*<sup>5</sup>, un'associazione di vecchia data che da anni promuove il recupero di una se-

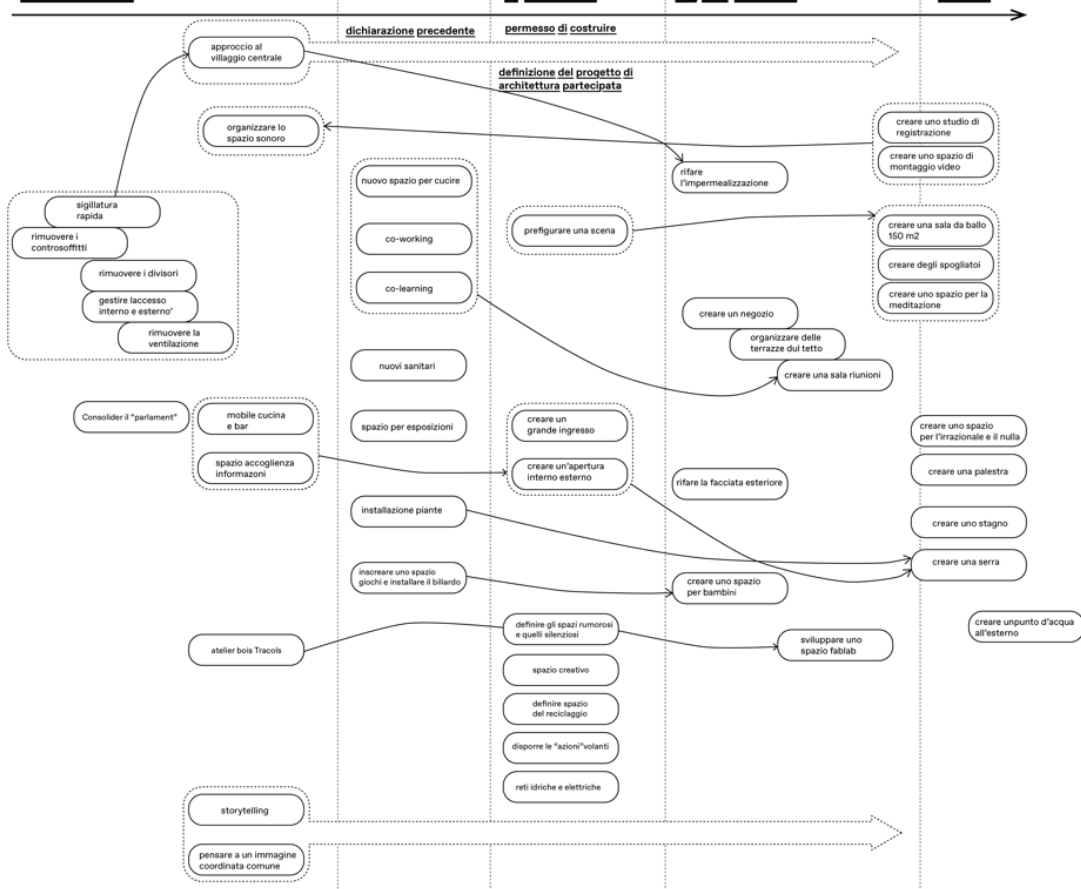
rie di edifici abbandonati nelle aree rurali della Drôme attraverso processi partecipativi. Queste esperienze diventano ancora più interessanti se lette all'interno di una cornice in cui si vedono proliferare cooperative immobiliari solidali come *Plateau Urbain*<sup>6</sup> e *Surface+Utile*<sup>7</sup>, che svolgono attività di consulenza e propongono soluzioni abitative e spazi di lavoro all'interno di contenitori abbandonati, supportando nuove forme di abitabilità di questi ultimi. Da questo genere di realtà nascono esperienze interessanti da osservare e conoscere: *Les 8 Pillards*<sup>8</sup>, un'associazione che nasce qualche anno fa a Marsiglia per recuperare e 'animare' l'ex industria metallurgica Pillard in una nuova dimensione artistica e culturale; l'idea alla base di questo progetto è prendersi cura di questo spazio, ma anche della comunità, riaprendolo e restituendolo come entità in divenire in grado di rispondere alle differenti esigenze, proponendosi come luogo di scambio di gesti e saperi.

In questa cornice, il presente contributo individua come particolarmente significativo il caso del *Collectif Etc*, uno dei collettivi di architetti francesi più conosciuti che da circa quindici anni opera in svariati territori, dapprima con base a Marsiglia e numerosi progetti localizzati nelle principali città francesi, e negli ultimi anni spostandosi in contesti sempre più estranei alle grandi metropoli con lo scopo di riattivare "third spaces" attraverso processi incrementali e basati sulla partecipazione. In tal senso, appare emblematico il progetto per *La Place des Pos-*

*sibles* a Saint-Laurent-en-Royans, che segna un punto di svolta tra la fase precedente e quella successiva, con lo spostamento di una parte del gruppo dalla città al contesto rurale, in cui mettersi in discussione non solo in quanto architetti, ma nelle proprie scelte di vita più profonde.

Fino a quel momento i loro progetti si concentrano infatti in aree urbane 'contese' – si vedano ad esempio il parlamento democratico mobile *PaPoMo* (proposto a più riprese a partire dal 2008), o la costruzione di spazi per la socialità e il gioco come *Fraternité Belle de Mai* (2018) e *Parc de la Carraire* (2017) – in cui l'occupazione dello spazio viene intesa come motore per rimettere in discussione i processi di trasformazione in corso, cercando di far emergere tematiche sociali ed ecologiche, coinvolgendo i cittadini nelle scelte politiche e nella successiva presa in carico degli spazi recuperati.

Con il progetto per *La Place des Possibles* il collettivo decide invece di spostarsi nel piccolo villaggio di 1.300 abitanti di Saint-Laurent-en-Royans, ai piedi del Vercors, nella Drôme, co-progettando con la comunità locale nuove forme di abitabilità in contesti differenti dai precedenti. In particolare, questo progetto si concentra sui 2500 mq di una fabbrica tessile dismessa risalente all'inizio del Novecento, che rinasce nel 2016 per volontà di diverse associazioni attive sul territorio, tra cui – Les Tracols, realtà proprietaria dell'immobile e impegnata in progetti sulla salute mentale e inclusione sociale per minori, insieme a ACCR, Activ'Royans,



Le Bruit du Plac'Arts e l'EPN de Pont. Queste organizzazioni, con diversi background e diverse competenze al loro interno, si sono strutturate in forma collettiva e collaborativa, cercando di identificare e affrontare le necessità e le aspirazioni del contesto e organizzando incontri con la comunità locale. Attraverso questo processo di coinvolgimento, ascolto e valorizzazione delle risorse locali, ha preso forma la definizione del nuovo ruolo di questi spazi. Si è avviata una fase di consultazione e collaborazione con enti e istituzioni locali, sostenuta da una serie di incontri regolari incentrati su temi di riflessione specifici, come progetti digitali, artistici e creativi, am-

bientali, solidali rispetto alla produzione e al riciclaggio. L'edificio ha aperto le proprie porte per la prima volta ai residenti della zona per essere visitato e conosciuto. A partire dal 2019, il collettivo di architetti è stato coinvolto per assistere la rete di associazioni non solo nella progettazione fisica del recupero degli spazi, ma anche nello sviluppo di una strategia di riattivazione graduale a medio-lungo termine con un valore sociale e culturale dello spazio.

Si organizzano quindi incontri e workshop con le varie associazioni coinvolte, includendo circa 25 soggetti. Questa fase ha rappresentato un momento cruciale per discutere e scambia-

## La Place des Possibles, Saint-Laurent-en-Royans, Francia. Cronoprogramma che delinea i diversi interventi da compiere nel breve, medio e lungo periodo all'interno dello spazio

Immagine: Collectif Etc, tradotta e rielaborata dalle autrici

Fig. 2

re idee riguardo al futuro del progetto. Attraverso l'utilizzo di metodologie partecipative, è stato possibile delineare una strategia globale a medio e lungo termine, focalizzandosi principalmente sulla trasformazione architettonica dello spazio. Dopo un anno di lavoro su questa strategia, si è passati alla fase di realizzazione con il primo workshop di costruzione. In questa occasione, si è deciso di coinvolgere un pubblico più ampio, includendo non solo gli attori locali già coinvolti, ma anche la popolazione locale, altre associazioni attive sul territorio, ex dipendenti della fabbrica tessile che occupava lo spazio e giovani in cerca di opportunità occupazionali e formative. Durante i workshop, svolti nel corso di tre anni, si è raggiunto un coinvolgimento significativo, con la partecipazione che oscillava tra un minimo di 10-15 persone e un massimo di 50, a seconda delle sessioni. Questi incontri hanno rappresentato un momento di condivisione di conoscenze e pratiche sulla trasformazione fisica dello spazio, ma anche lo sviluppo di nuove relazioni e connessioni tra i partecipanti. Inoltre, è stata organizzata una serie di eventi culturali, come concerti, dibattiti e proiezioni cinematografiche, per coinvolgere ulteriormente la popolazione locale e far conoscere le nuove opportunità offerte dallo spazio trasformato. Il progetto si presenta dunque come un processo di costruzione e definizione di un nuovo hub socio-culturale: vengono organizzati dei momenti di confronto in cui la comunità locale è chiamata a dialogare, e vengono organiz-

zati workshop di autocostruzione con lo scopo sia di recuperare lo spazio, sia di allargare ulteriormente la rete di soggetti coinvolti. Un grande 'contenitore' di cui si co-progetta non solo la forma fisica dello spazio, ma anche nella forma dei contenuti, degli usi e dei soggetti che vanno progressivamente ad inserirvisi. Riemerge quindi il concetto di cura alla base dell'intera iniziativa, che è concepita per stimolare la presa in carico di questo spazio nel tempo attraverso una pluralità di sguardi, cercando di rinsaldare ulteriormente una comunità per certi versi fragile poiché localizzata al margine rispetto all'erogazione di numerosi servizi. *La Place des Possibles* si costituisce quindi non tanto come strumento di contrattazione politica in luoghi in cui il valore d'uso del suolo è elevato, ma al contrario come occasione per mettere a sistema una serie di *know-how* e di iniziative già in essere, producendo *dal basso* i servizi necessari per la comunità stessa, costruendo uno spazio di scambio reciproco e condiviso.

Similmente ai casi precedenti, si pone al centro del processo l'innovazione sociale, economica e culturale, e lo si fa elaborando un progetto di riattivazione che non consiste nell'elaborazione di un'immagine finale - di un recupero completo e chiaramente definito - ma attraverso un progetto in grado di cambiare direzione, flettersi e crescere progressivamente assieme ai vari step di co-costruzione a seconda delle occasioni che via via di presentano. Vengono organizzati workshop in cui si lavora su delle grandi serigra-



**La Place des Possibles,  
Saint-Laurent-en-Royans,  
Francia. Un momento del  
laboratorio di costruzione  
partecipata organizzato per  
la ridefinizione degli spazi  
della “Place des Possibles”**

Foto: <http://www.collectifetc.com/realisation/la-place-des-possibles/>

Fig. 4

## La Place des Possibles, Saint-Laurent-en-Royans, Francia. Co-progettazione per riconversione degli spazi tramite coinvolgimento attivo e ascolto della comunità locale

Foto: <http://www.collectifetc.com/realisation/la-place-des-possibles/>

Fig. 3

fie da utilizzare come arredo interno per indicare i vari spazi; sul riutilizzo dei materiali degli impianti per trasformarli in mobili e segnaletica; sulla ricostruzione dello spazio lineare di uffici e laboratori per la formazione, posto all'ingresso principale. Si tratta quindi di un processo di apprendimento collaborativo in cui 'si impara facendo'.

Tuttavia, il progetto va in crisi nel momento in cui questi equilibri creati negli anni iniziano a incrinarsi, mostrando i limiti di operazioni di questo tipo sul medio-lungo periodo. Nonostante i quattro anni di intensi sforzi volti al miglioramento, il progetto ha infatti subito un esito negativo, dovuto all'incapacità di formare una governance orizzontale tra i partner del progetto. La mancanza di collaborazione e gli interessi divergenti tra le parti coinvolte portano il progetto a chiudersi e sgretolarsi: l'associazione *Les Tracols* - che ha acquistato lo spazio sei anni prima per svolgervi il proprio lavoro e catalizzare altre forme di associazionismo e servizi - è strettamente legata all'assistenza sociale, un settore che in Francia riceve consistenti finanziamenti pubblici; progetti culturali e artistici, hanno invece più difficoltà nell'ottenere finanziamenti dal settore pubblico, e questo ha creato una disparità di opportunità e risorse tra i soggetti coinvolti nel processo, contribuendo al fallimento dell'operazione, con la chiusura parziale del progetto a partire dal 2023.

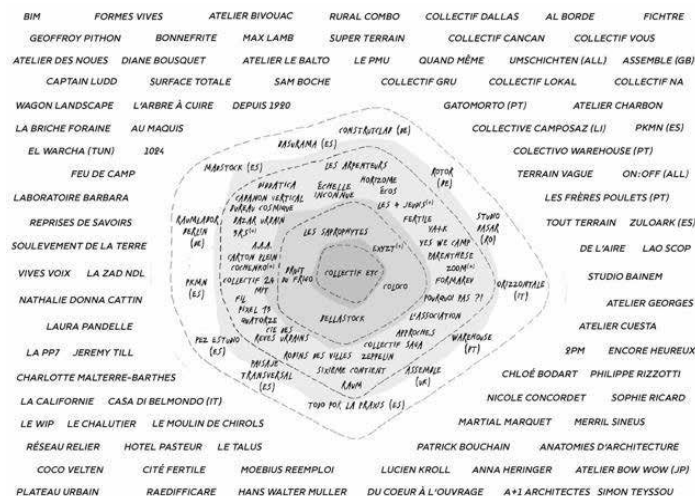
Tuttavia, il fallimento diventa parte integrante del processo da osservare - un'opportunità di ri-

flessione sia per chi ne ha fatto parte, sia per chi avvia progetti analoghi - mettendo in evidenza il forte carattere di singolarità che contraddistingue queste progettualità, senza possibilità di replicabilità e di standardizzazione delle pratiche stesse. Anche nel fallimento del progetto, emerge come ogni partecipante sia parte integrante della sua riuscita, con specifiche competenze e conoscenze che vanno valorizzate. Questa consapevolezza porta ad una maggiore maturità nel concepire e realizzare progetti futuri, dove la condivisione dei valori e la collaborazione diventano fondamentali per il successo e la sostenibilità delle iniziative comunitarie.

Inoltre, questo processo ha portato Collectif Etc a entrare in contatto e fare rete con numerose realtà del territorio, con cui nel tempo si è creata una dinamica di scambio reciproco, creando una condizione di mutuo supporto che li porterà a crescere collettivamente anche in futuro.

È in questo tentativo di dare direzione ad attività di co-creazione che vediamo concretizzate teorizzazioni femministe sui beni comuni e la cura. I beni comuni sono visti come una condizione preliminare per una migliore soluzione di vita per tutti, poiché basati sulla cura delle persone, spazi e oggetti. Questo approccio è in netto contrasto con la logica che regna all'interno di un'economia capitalista, basata sull'exploitation della natura e delle risorse per generare profitti per pochi (Elzenbaumer et al., 2022).

Se è vero, come scrivono Delfini e Snoriguzzi (2019, p.100), che "tutte queste sperimentazioni



## Schema delle pratiche urbane e architettoniche esistenti in connessione con il Collectif Etc.

Fonte: Collectif Etc, <http://www.collectifetc.com/eng>.

Fig. 5

– dal quartiere autoconstruito alle estensioni dei cortili, compresa la fabbrica dismessa, occupata e riqualificata – disegnano gli spazi a immagine delle comunità che li abitano e dei territori in cui esistono. L'abitante non è dissociato dal progettista e dal costruttore. Vivere diventa un processo e non più semplicemente un modo di stare. Questo è uno dei primi atti di resistenza alla metropoli [...]”<sup>9</sup>, le esperienze raccolte in questo articolo intendono mettere in evidenza questa condizione di osmosi tra la comunità locale e il progetto. Il punto focale non è più la realizzazione di un disegno spaziale, o di un profitto in termini economici, quanto più la sperimentazione continua nel dar forma al processo, un'entità complessa in perenne aggiustamento, che prova a costituirsi come forma di resistenza in antitesi rispetto alla condizione metropolitana.

Dal punto di vista lessicale, il prefisso “auto” – che spesso nella società capitalista è associato a una dimensione fortemente individualista – quando accostato al termine “costruzione” può

all'opposto indicare forme di coesione sociale e costruzione *da parte e per* la comunità (La Facto, 2023). Questo è chiaramente rintracciabile nelle attività organizzate nei vari lavori dal Collectif Etc, seppur sfociando in taluni casi nell'occupazione risonante di spazi ‘visibili’ e contesi all'interno delle città, definiti dall'esclusione di alcune porzioni di comunità e da forti tensioni politiche e sociali; in altri casi di progressiva riscoperta di spazi abbandonati, luoghi in cui il processo deve inevitabilmente complessificarsi e rallentare, cercando forme innovative di riattivazione. In questo secondo caso ancor più che nel primo, la costruzione di *commons* deve passare inevitabilmente attraverso una presa di coscienza del valore non solo dello spazio, ma delle pratiche da parte di chi se ne prenderà cura giorno dopo giorno.

*La Place des Possibles* permette di osservare questioni fondamentali che si collegano ai temi di *care* e *commons*, come il coinvolgimento e il sostegno alla comunità locale, la gestione della





## Mappa delle pratiche urbane e architettoniche esistenti in connessione con il Collectif Etc.

Fonte: Collectif Etc, <http://www.collectifetc.com/eng>.

Fig. 6

governance condivisa e la sostenibilità in senso lato di tali iniziative, nonché la promozione della collaborazione e degli scambi a livello locale e la costruzione di un'infrastruttura sociale e culturale di supporto. Attraverso incontri, workshop e eventi culturali, è possibile creare spazi di partecipazione che favoriscono lo scambio di idee e il coinvolgimento attivo dei residenti, provando a comprendere le esigenze e gli obiettivi della comunità locale, garantendo un approccio partecipativo e collaborativo che promuova un senso di appartenenza e di identità condivisa rispetto al progetto.

Se nel rimettere 'i margini al centro' è necessario dare spazio alle forme di *innovazione creativa* che lì possono germogliare (Carrosio, 2019), i progetti presentati in questo articolo – e l'esperienza di *La Place des Possibles* in particolare, se letta nella sua fase finale disgregativa – mostrano il profondo valore delle dimensioni di *apprendimento collettivo* e *coesione sociale*, condizioni tanto fondamentali quanto, tuttavia,

fragili se non trattate con la giusta cura.

Da sottolineare è il ruolo complementare svolto dalle diverse associazioni già attive nello spazio, che hanno contribuito a invitare le proprie reti di contatti e a consolidare i legami con la comunità locale. Mentre *Collectif Etc* si è concentrato principalmente sulla trasformazione architettonica dello spazio, altre associazioni hanno lavorato per mantenere e rafforzare i legami con la comunità locale, creando così un approccio integrato e sinergico al coinvolgimento della comunità. Gli individui partecipanti sono non solo utilizzatori di risorse, ma le loro pratiche sociali legate ai commons sono anche modellate dalle dinamiche identitarie della comunità. In questo contesto, la comunità assume un ruolo centrale in diversi processi di condivisione, contribuendo alla socializzazione dello spazio rurale e alla "produzione di località" (Appadurai, 1996). L'analisi del caso studio evidenzia come i processi in questione incarnino il concetto di cura non limitandosi alla costruzione individuale di servizi



**La Place des Possibles, Saint-Laurent-en-Royans, Francia. Il progetto ASOC ha l'interesse di creare connessione tra tre scuole di architettura, con progetti di comunità locali in aree marginali e una generazione di architetti-attivisti organizzati in collettivi provenienti da Francia, Italia e Grecia. I pasti collettivi sono un momento di costruzione del team delle tre scuole, i collettivi e le realtà locali. Il cibo enfatizza l'importanza del costruire comunità, segnando un momento di condivisione di esperienze, valori e culture**

Foto: Silvia Lanteri, 2022

Fig. 7-8

alla persona, ma abbracciando l'idea di creazione di un'infrastruttura di cura più ampia. I *commoner* rivendicano l'idea di bene comune, senza rinunciare tuttavia alle loro singolarità entrando all'interno di una comunità. Questa cultura suggerisce un'esistenza comune, "una rete aperta di singolarità che si collegano tra loro sulla base del comune che condividono e del comune che producono" (Hardt, Negri 2004, p. 129). A seguito del fallimento del progetto, il Collectif Etc sta agendo come rete di supporto per altre realtà, non solo in relazione alle associazioni, ma anche nell'ottica di agire in un contesto sociale allargato. Questa rete, pur non essendo tangibile come una struttura materiale, si manifesta come un legame sociale tra individui e gruppi.

Questo approccio si è concretizzato nella creazione dell'associazione francese *Superville*, che riunisce i collettivi di architetti e paesaggisti desiderosi di promuovere un cambiamento sociale ed ecologico. Questa rete si è ulteriormente ampliata grazie all'organizzazione di eventi a Nantes che hanno permesso ad altri collettivi locali di presentare il proprio lavoro, entrando in connessione con istituzioni e comunità locali.

### **ASOC come occasione per esplorare un'architettura della cura**

Promuovere la mobilitazione e l'organizzazione dal livello locale a quello internazionale (Scholten, 2019) è in questi casi fondamentale. L'impegno del collettivo nella creazione di reti e collaborazioni dimostra che non agisce isolato, ma

in un'ottica di condivisione di risorse, conoscenze e supporto reciproco per ampliare il proprio impatto e creare un cambiamento positivo nella società. Questo contributo nasce proprio da un'occasione di incontro e contaminazione proposta dal progetto ASOC<sup>10</sup>, che ci ha consentito di osservare da vicino progettualità di questo tipo – tra cui, nello specifico, *La Place des Possibles* – in differenti territori a cavallo tra Italia, Grecia e Francia. In questo progetto erasmus+ i concetti di *care*, *commons*, *progetto* e *comunità* sono stati messi al centro di una riflessione teorica quanto progettuale. Ci si è posti delle domande rispetto a cosa significhi costruire un'"infrastruttura della cura" (Care Collectif, 2021), cercando di proporre un'alternativa a forme e modi del progetto che si collocano entro pratiche estrattive consolidate, ponendo il recupero degli spazi abbandonati in una dimensione di cura *per* e *da parte* della comunità locale, attraverso l'attivazione di quei "vuoti" (Tantillo, 2023) prodotti dai cambiamenti socio-economici contemporanei.

In quest'ottica, ASOC ha l'interesse di costruire ponti tra scuole di architettura, progetti di comunità locali in aree marginali e una generazione di architetti-attivisti organizzati in collettivi. Tali ponti assumono la forma di laboratori di apprendimento e d'azione, che coinvolgono tutte le parti e producono cambiamenti concreti. Questi intensi momenti di lavoro permettono agli studenti di sviluppare nuove competenze e abilità per affrontare realtà complesse come quelle



## La Place des Possibles, Saint-Laurent-en-Royans, Francia. Attività di autoconstruzione praticate dagli studenti all'interno dei workshop ASOC. Eventi serali organizzati durante i workshop ASOC, con la partecipazione della comunità locale

Foto: Silvia Lanteri, 2022

Fig 9-10

sopra descritte, che richiedono un approccio fortemente collaborativo. Tali attività *in situ* hanno una valenza pedagogica verso una pratica etica dell'architettura, per rispondere alle emergenze contemporanee e future. Allo stesso tempo, questi progetti sociali localizzati ricevono un valido supporto per il loro sviluppo.

All'interno di questa cornice, si è presentata l'opportunità di esaminare e approfondire le dinamiche di costruzione dei *commons* e delle pratiche di cura in contesti di questo genere, considerando diversi territori a confronto. Da ciò emerge una differenza sostanziale legata a dinamiche di identificazione degli enti che presentano il progetto sul territorio, alle possibilità di sostentamento economico, alle politiche territoriali in atto e alle possibilità di azione.

Nello specifico, attraverso alcune interviste ai membri del *Collectif Etc*<sup>11</sup>, si è provato a mettere a fuoco alcune questioni al centro della presente riflessione. L'esperienza al centro di questa riflessione ha amplificato la consapevolezza del

collettivo riguardo alla situazionalità delle proprie pratiche come progettisti.

Situarsi e situare la propria pratica è un tema centrale nelle discussioni femministe. Per elaborare questa esigenza si può far riferimento alle geografie femministe citando il lavoro di Donna Haraway (2015) e Sandra Harding (1991). Questa necessità nasce dalla consapevolezza dei progettisti che l'azione progettuale dipenderà da chi sono i suoi attori, progettisti e non.

L'architetto si trasforma da "autore" a facilitatore di processi (Straus, 1978). Il coinvolgimento della comunità locale nel progetto *La Place des Possibles* è stato progressivo, attraverso una serie di fasi che hanno permesso di stabilire una connessione con gli abitanti del territorio. Innanzitutto, il primo passo è stato quello di incontrare e connettersi con le persone, le associazioni e i gruppi già coinvolti nel progetto. Questo coinvolgimento iniziale ha permesso di comprendere le esigenze, gli obiettivi e i sogni della comunità, fornendo una base solida per il pro-

sieguo del lavoro.

Concettualizzando e inquadrando i *commons* come processi contestualmente fondati, questo articolo esplora quindi come il *Collectif Etc* – e nello specifico il progetto *La Place des Possibles* – mostri un'attenzione ai processi di appropriazione e riattivazione di spazi marginali di vario genere, attenzione che si plasma attorno alla differente realtà che li ospita, trasferendo ai contesti extraurbani alcuni aspetti dell'esperienza di pratiche sedimentatesi in città. L'attenzione al modo in cui i *commons* si riproducono nel tempo in relazione all'infrastruttura di relazioni che si crea, può aiutare a far emergere ulteriori questioni relative al modo in cui questi si producono e generano a loro volta degli effetti sul luogo in cui si radicano. In tali processi, i beni comuni sono spesso messi in gioco nel plasmare i risultati del sistema di risorse comuni e nella produzione di identità specifiche locali (Appadurai, 1996; Mosse, 1997). Utilizzando il concetto di *commoning* introdotto da Linebaugh (2008) e successivamente sviluppato da Bollier e Helfrich (2015), si assumono dunque i *commons* come processo costruito nella riproduzione generale della comunità, sottolineandone la natura sfocata, che non comprendono solo un insieme di relazioni di proprietà, ma anche pratiche associative intorno a specifiche risorse, luoghi ed edifici che vengono gestiti collettivamente, indipendentemente dalla loro forma giuridica (Ostrom, 1990; Hardin, 1968). In questa prospettiva, i *commons* non sono so-

lo risorse giuridiche ed economiche<sup>12</sup>, ma anche importanti risorse sociali che fanno convergere le persone in uno spazio per uno scopo comune. In questo modo, il concetto di *commons* è vicino a quello di comunità, in quanto l'uso comune che li contraddistingue può essere visto come una parte importante della costruzione simbolica della comunità stessa (Cohen, 1985; Fournier, 2013, Stravides, 2016). Tali spazi e i relativi processi di occupazione e riattivazione possono essere visti come un collante socio-ecologico che contribuisce quindi a costituire le comunità che li abitano (Federici, 2012).

Concettualizzando i *commons* in questo modo ed esplorando il modo in cui si riproducono nel tempo in relazione a cambiamenti sociali più ampi, è possibile comprendere non solo i dilemmi delle risorse, ma anche il modo in cui vengono costruiti luoghi e identità specifiche. Non si tratta semplicemente di spiegare come l'uso delle risorse influenzi i *commons*, ma piuttosto di esplorare come i diversi processi di *commoning* si co-evolvano e come siano incorporati nelle società che li utilizzano (Nightingale, 2011).

In questo genere di processi, il ruolo del progettista è anch'esso in mutamento, si concentra sempre più nel riconoscere e valorizzare le competenze locali, come osservatore e facilitatore nel processo di cura del territorio. Le progettualità riportate di seguito, dimostrano come l'apertura al dialogo e alla collaborazione con le comunità, così come la creazione di reti di attori locali, possa arricchire il bagaglio professionale degli

architetti e portare a risultati più significativi ed ecosistemici, seppur fragili in alcuni casi.

Nello specifico, nel contesto del collettivo di progettisti, si manifesta chiaramente la volontà di mettersi a disposizione di queste conoscenze, arricchendole delle esperienze maturate nei contesti urbani. Questa sinergia tra le competenze dell'architetto e le conoscenze locali permette una maggiore integrazione e un arricchimento reciproco, contribuendo a una pratica più inclusiva e sensibile alle specificità locali.

Nei contesti marginali, appare ancora più evidente come condividiamo e co-creiamo questo mondo con piante, animali, funghi, batteri e virus. Essere in questo mondo significa essere interdipendenti: assumiamo che non esista una figura come un individuo indipendente, siamo costantemente interdipendenti con gli altri, ed è questa relazione che ci definisce (Haraway, 2014).

L'"architettura della cura" (Fitz, Krasny, 2019) si plasma attraverso questa visione sistemica ed ecologica, e rappresenta una via urgente e necessaria per il benessere planetario e la sopravvivenza, in grado di considerare le molteplici e interconnesse esigenze tra esseri umani, non-umani e ambiente circostante. Lo spazio richiede cura per mantenere la sua esistenza, poiché dipende dalla manutenzione quotidiana da parte della/per la comunità che lo vive. Fin dalle sue origini, è stato concepito come un rifugio per proteggere la vita umana, e noi ce ne prendiamo cura.

Nell'ambito di tali processi, diventa cruciale la costruzione di infrastrutture di supporto e cura. Progetti con fragilità analoghe a quelle incontrate nei casi proposti in questo articolo – che si rivelano talvolta privi di scambi collaborativi e di una rete di divulgazione e sostegno che resista e si incrementi nel medio-lungo periodo – rischiano di non sopravvivere nel tempo. Tuttavia, le sfide e i fallimenti riscontrati, evidenziano la natura sperimentale e innovativa di questi processi, che ne rappresenta da un lato la forza intrinseca, e dall'altra ne spiega le possibili debolezze. Infine, il concetto di *everyday social reproduction* (Graham, 1991) – fondamento nell'ambito della letteratura femminista sul *care* – assume in questo articolo particolare rilevanza, evidenziando come all'interno di una comunità il progetto diventi parte della coscienza collettiva stessa. La responsabilità del progettista e il valore attribuito al suo ruolo – qui messo in relazione al tema del supporto domestico presente nella letteratura femminista – emergono come concetti centrali, sottolineando l'importanza di una prospettiva attenta e sensibile alle esigenze della comunità.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Vedere, ad esempio, Rural Commons Assembly (<https://ruralcommonsassembly.com>) e Rural Commons Festival ([www.ruralcommonsfestival.com](http://www.ruralcommonsfestival.com)).

<sup>2</sup> Si veda <https://francetierslieux.fr/>

<sup>3</sup> Per maggiori informazioni, si rimanda al sito web: <https://yeswecamp.org/en>

<sup>4</sup> <https://villagesvivants.com/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://lechalutier.org/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.plateau-urbain.com/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://surfaceplusutile.com/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.les8pillards.com/>

<sup>9</sup> Citazione tradotta dalle autrici, di seguito l'originale: "toutes ces expérimentations - du quartier autoconstruit aux extensions des courées, en passant par l'usine désaffectée, occupée puis réaménagée - dessinent des espaces à l'image des communautés qui les habitent, et des territoires dans lesquels elles s'insèrent. L'habitant n'est pas dissocié du concep-

teur et du constructeur. Habiter devient un processus, et non plus simplement un état. C'est là un des premiers actes de résistance à la métropole : reconquérir du pouvoir sur les modalités de production des logements et de la ville, retrouver des marges d'autonomie, reconstruire une ville réellement habitée" (Delfini e Snoriguzzi, 2019, p. 100).

<sup>10</sup> ASOC è l'acronimo di (Architecture) School of commons. Alternative architectural pedagogies sharing experiences with rural communities and architecture Collectifs across Europe. Il progetto è stato selezionato alla call 'Erasmus Plus Cooperative Partnership' e ha una durata triennale (2021-2024). Si tratta di un lavoro che intreccia esperienze di didattica internazionale con sperimentazioni di alleanze multi attoriali per definire pratiche progettuali innovative. Per questa ragione di definisce attraverso una partnership estesa tra Università di Architettura (Politecnico di Torino, ENSA Grenoble, NTUA Athens), collettivi di architetti (Collectif Etc, Zuloark, Oriz-

zontale) e organizzazioni locali (La Rivoluzione delle Seppie, TiriLab), a cavallo tra in Francia, Italia e Grecia. L'obiettivo è quello di esplorare la collaborazione tra questi diversi soggetti per ripensare modelli pedagogici e temi e modi del progetto che tengano conto delle principali sfide ecologiche e sociali in atto. Per ulteriori informazioni si rimanda alla piattaforma del progetto: <https://asoc.eu.com/>

<sup>11</sup> Le interviste svolte a più riprese - prima a settembre 2023 a Théo Mouzard, e successivamente ad marzo-aprile 2024 a Maxence Bohn - hanno consentito di mettere a fuoco e discutere con loro alcune delle questioni centrali caratterizzanti il loro percorso di crescita come collettivo, nonché il cambio di paradigma che si è percepito proprio con il progetto La Place des Possibles che li vede spostarsi da Marsiglia alle zone marginali di Saint-Laurant-en-Royans (FR).

<sup>12</sup> Vedere discussione di Bromley (1991 e 1992) sulla proprietà comune e sul regime di proprietà comune.

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# Reception through Mobile Commons

## Disrupting Exclusion and Negotiating Solidarity Politics through Brussels' Squats

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### Introduction

Living outside conventional accommodations is a predicament of many 'undesirable' migrants (Agier, 2016). Recent examinations of migrants' living conditions in urban areas of Brussels portray illegalized migrants as often forced to reside in (in)hospitable makeshift dwellings, where they are deprived of intimacy and agency in the process of establishing a home (Trossat, 2024). While squatting for citizens may signify reclaiming urban spaces to cultivate alternative

communities and capabilities (Bouillon, 2009), for illegalized migrants, it emerges from an urgent need to secure shelter and envision potential settlement in arrival cities (Marchiset, 2020). Contrary to abstract notions of community building, squats are thrust upon illegalized migrants as a means to acquire shelter within the inherent contradictions of a reception system rooted in securitarian approaches and the exclusion of those deemed undeserving (Ravn et al., 2020). Despite existing de-

*This study investigates the complex dynamics of squatting in Brussels, examining its influence on shaping solidarity norms and values in urban settings. Through participative observation conducted within squats, we identify a recurring pattern: the (re)production and negotiation of mobile commons. Analyzing three squatting instances, we emphasize their role as not only spaces for commons (re)production but also platforms for the social becoming of migrants and citizens. We argue that squats are not mere shelters but dynamic spaces where negotiation and social*

### keywords

inequality  
solidarity  
proximity  
third sector  
covid-19 pandemic  
gift practices

*transformation occur, challenging conventional humanitarian assistance models. Ultimately, this research highlights the significance of (re)producing alternative dwelling infrastructures for illegalized migrants in shaping the urban commons and thereby impacting everyday urban politics of solidarity.*

bates often framing migrant squats in terms of their deficiencies, our research is focused on understanding their catalytic potential. The politics, norms, and values negotiated through these dwelling infrastructures lie at the core of our investigation.

Building on these considerations, it is noteworthy to situate our argument within the existing debates on shared resources and spaces collectively managed by migrants and pro-migrant communities. This interest emerges from reflections on urban life and the everyday revolts, strategies, and tactics of migrants, drawing on Lefebvrian and De Certeausian theories. In *Critical Border and Migration Studies*, this approach has led to reflections on infrastructures of migration (Xiang and Lindquist, 2014), the mobile commons (Trimikliniotis et al., 2015), and infra-structuration politics (Meeus et al., 2019). Scholars examining how migrants persist in hostile contexts have highlighted the complex interplay between forms of solidarity, care, and support among migrants and their allies in urban land-

scapes (Della Porta, 2018; Ataç et al., 2021). The city serves as a crucial observation point to (re)examine the management and maintenance of common resources by migrant and pro-migrant communities, beyond rigid notions of formal reception and management. This line of reflection underscores the importance of shared resources and spaces accessible to people who are constantly on the move, such as humanitarian structures and information points—essentially, the infrastructures of arrival (Meeus et al., 2019). These scholars emphasize that sharing and sustaining a common includes those who may not have permanent or stable residence but still rely on shared resources and spaces.

In urban areas where migrants settle upon arrival in a new country or region, the informal dwelling spaces stand as a common, collectively produced by people in motion, be that activist groups and migrants, who continuously generate and expand their ways of appropriating space as they navigate through specific migratory journey (Dadusc, 2019). These dwelling spaces are not static entities, they are continuously shaped and expanded by collective actions of migrants and their supporters. This collective production of space reflects various productions of norms and practices around assistance, sup-



port, and solidarity with and among migrants, where knowledge, resources, and practices transpire from different sources to navigate repressive and exhaustive exclusions produced by migration control dispositive and establish, in the margins of that, a livelihood and social becoming (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013).

In Brussels, the reception of the asylum seekers has been declared in 'crisis' since 2015. The state of crisis served as a primary catalyst for citizen mobilizations in solidarity with migrants in Belgium (Debelder, 2020). Generally, civil society played a pivotal role during crises, irrespective of their intentions and motivations. This involvement manifests either through voluntary participation in established governmental or non-governmental organizations or through the emergence of new informal groups composed mainly of citizens. One manifestation of this solidarity is alternative dwelling infrastructures (i.e. squats) for illegalized migrants in Brussels.

A form of reappropriation of space for those excluded by reception and immigration imperatives of deservingness (Ravn et al., 2020). Relevant to this account is a brief contextualization for the squatting initiatives directed to accommodating illegalized migrants.

In 2015, due to the augmented arrivals of protection seekers and their exclusion from reception structures, an improvised refugee camp in the North Quarter of Brussels was built.

The Maximilian Park witnessed a noteworthy humanitarian response from community-based and citizen-led initiatives (Lafaut and Coene, 2019; Vandevordt, 2019). The open park and the material assistance provided by humanitarian groups, have attracted additional categories of migrants in precarious situations, such as 'transit migrants' seeking to reach another destination country, and undocumented individuals—those either denied residency permits or who did not meet eligibility criteria for asy-

# Illegalized people and solidarity collectives occupying the Maximilian Park in 2017

Credit: Valentina Pop (2017)

Fig. 1

lum application. Around this makeshift camp many volunteer citizens and civil society associations have gravitated, some of whom formally united under the “Citizens’ Platform in Support of Refugees” to address the gap in the reception of refugees. Be that as it may, following two years, the Secretary of State for Asylum and Immigration, imposed a strict ban on staying in the park in 2017 and initiated police raids to evacuate and arrest people with irregular status. This sparked a climate of resistance against this aggressive political action, leading not only to the inception of the building occupation for refugees and undocumented people but also to citizen housing (Clarbout, 2020). While some citizens began opening their doors to park inhabitants facing the violence of police raids, activist collectives engaged in monitoring, occupying and sustaining vacant buildings in Brussels to shelter migrants exhausted by police aggression. Whether driven by political activism or humanitarian aid, these efforts faced a significant setback when the federal legislature responded with the 2017 anti-squat law, criminalizing the occupation of vacant buildings and prioritizing property rights over the housing of excluded migrant people.

The Covid-19 pandemic, however, introduced a new dynamic. Temporary permissions for building occupations were granted, revealing a complex interplay between public health measures and authority’s tolerance to migrants’ support. This temporary allowance aimed to mitigate

sanitary risks and create sanitary corridors, providing vulnerable migrants with essential shelter and care during the emergency. The framing of emergency, crisis, and deservingness thus become the battleground on which temporary dwelling infrastructures of illegalized migrants and refugees are negotiated.

The reception ‘crisis’ (Rea et al., 2019) underscored the inadequacies of official reception structures, prompting a robust response from community-based and solidarity initiatives. Networks such as migrant solidarity groups and the Citizens’ Platform emerged as reactions to these deficiencies. These groups oscillate between a humanitarian logic that maintains a politically neutral stance (Lou Vertongen, 2018) and forms political contestation (Mescoli, Roblain, and Griffioen, 2020). Despite their differing intentions, these initiatives foster interpersonal relations among diverse subjects in support and solidarity contexts. This interaction gives rise to a third posture known as subversive humanitarianism (Vandervoordt, 2019), emancipating migrants from being mere recipients of aid and stimulating their socio-political subjectivities.

The federation of various actors around migratory solidarity and reception generates nuanced subjectivities and materialities. However, existing accounts predominantly center on citizens and their engagements, presuming them to be the primary agents of solidarity and the arbiters of its dynamics. Our proposition broadens

this scope to encompass both documented and undocumented migrants, thus acknowledging the complexities inherent in discussions surrounding solidarity, reception, and broader occurrences. Shifting away from static depictions of solidarity to interconnected circulations that sustain its flow and transformation underscore the integral role of migrant people themselves in shaping and navigating terrain of solidarity and reception in Brussels.

Indeed, squatting serves as a manifestation of solidarity with marginalized migrants, presenting a complex phenomenon that warrants a thorough examination of the politics, norms, and values underpinning the creation of these mobile communities (Trimiklinioti et al., 2015). This study highlights how the (re)production of these dwelling spaces not only shapes nuanced definitions of norms and values concerning aid and solidarity but also influences the social becoming of migrants and citizens within the contexts of emergency, crisis and deservingness.

### Methods

This paper is informed through participative observation and direct engagement, as conceptualized by Routedledge (2013), to provide an in-depth analysis of squatters' collectives and undocumented squatters in Brussels. Our approach builds on immersive techniques such as shadowing (Quinlan, 2008) and direct involvement with the subject communities. By actively participating in monitoring, occupying and

sustaining some squats, the case study gains a multi-sited perspective of the processes of infrastructuring these spaces. Comprehensive qualitative methods, including in-depth conversations with both documented and undocumented squatters, activists, and other stakeholders enable the collection of nuanced insights into the establishment and maintenance of squats, particularly among migrant populations grappling with legal challenges. From November 2023 to the present time, ethnographic observations and life stories were collected with subjects who are directly implicated in migrant squats—whether as residents, supporters, or organizations attempting to manage these spaces. This criterion ensures that the research is informed by those with first-hand experience and knowledge of the complexities involved. The multiplicity of observation points—ranging from organized collectives to undocumented squatters operating independently—provides contextualized accounts of lived experiences. These stories and observations illuminated ways solidarity politics are (re)produced and negotiated through squats.

### Contentious intentions, norms and practices

In the following, I will then delve into three situations observed in the heart of Brussels' urban center. The aim is to gain deeper insights into the nuanced forms of producing and maintaining squat. The intention is not an analysis of squats per se, but rather an analysis of the



## Squat-support gathered in front of an occupied building to prevent the expulsion by the federal police in Brussels

Credit: Rock'in Squat (2024)

Fig.2

norms and practices produced through squats. We consider squats as an observation point to these occurrences.

In Brussels different activist groups linked to urban movements of squatting have engaged in solidarity with illegalized migrants excluded from reception structures. The idea is to arrive in a vacant building left to abandonment and to redevelop a living environment for the excluded migrants. As Fadi, a Palestinian spokesperson of the Squat S collective, defines it: "to bring life back where there was none". These collectives have started their projects of squatting and framing occupied spaces through different associations. At first, they were gravitating around the Maximilian Park, later on they have

developed activities oriented towards framing and informing individuals and collectives about temporary occupation. Squatters, as they occupy buildings, aim to pressure the owner and public authorities to sign an 'occupation convention'. This agreement allows squatters to stay in the building until the owner decides its use. It initiates negotiations about ownership and the societal obligation of property owners who keep their buildings empty rather than offering shelter to homeless migrants.

The laissez-faire occupations in Brussels are shaped through practical norms (De Sardan, 2021) of emergency, vulnerability, and security in the neighborhood. A priori federal authorities levy taxes on owners who leave their

buildings vacant, citing concerns that such situations attract drug users and criminals to abandoned properties. However, squatters play on this partition, emphasizing the vulnerability of marginalized migrants and the urgent need to house them in empty buildings. This approach is deemed to address both neighborhood security and the accommodation of homeless migrants through organized squatting. If the squatters assert the vulnerability of the occupants, citizen support is mobilized to prevent eviction ordered by the courts in favor of the building owner, often seen as prioritizing private priority over public welfare.

Through squatting, people produced norms and practices around vulnerable migrants, protection, and private property. The general credo defended by the squatters and their allies is that «public authorities cannot evict single migrant women with their children to the street just to preserve private property». As Victor, a lawyer supporting squatters argues «property owners cannot exert absolute control over their properties. They assert that owners have a social and societal responsibility to prevent their properties from remaining vacant, as it damages the neighborhood's reputation, impacts the living conditions of residents, and fosters feelings of insecurity». In contrast, the lawyer maintains that occupying vacant buildings through housing excluded migrants and bridging their integration in the city of Brussels revitalizes neighborhoods and fosters social cohesion. The

production of meaning on vulnerability, protection, private property, but also the preservation of the Common serves as the battleground where the production and the maintenance of squats is negotiated and contested.

Once squatters successfully secure temporary occupation, what negotiations ensue? In the following we will explore three cases. (1) a collective of squatters led by people with migrant backgrounds with temporary resident permits. (2) a collective composed of European activists, positioning themselves as 'citizen-support' and (3) undocumented migrants who have engaged in squatting houses aside from organized collectives. Through the three cases we will explore how different groups gravitating around squats produce nuanced norms, practices, and directionalities through squats.

### **Squat S Collective**

For Squat S collective (hereinafter SSC), squatting is seen as a strategic tool for political advocacy and the production of alternative solidarity with excluded migrants in Brussels and in Belgium at large. «About 10 years ago, the idea to squat buildings not only for housing but also to push political agendas for migrants or shed light on regularization-related issues took place. But now, it's slowly losing its significance. For many collectives, squatting is oriented to a banal direction. Take V (collective) for example. They claim to be an independent political voice, doing small actions...But V. is getting co-opted



by certain militant movements, by the authorities, and now they're basically a dormitory. V. isn't any more self-managed. Relying on hand-outs from citizens' support and donations made them dependent». Says Fadi, nuancing their position to that of other collectives. Fadi questions the evolution of squats, exemplified by the case of V., once a site of political activism but now primarily focused solely on housing as the goal. To Fadi, this puts the V. collective in a vulnerable position to appropriation, either by authorities or other politicized collectives. «In Brussels all migrant groups are pushed to get political. Some anarchist crews want to use other people's misery to fuel their own activism. It is what keeps them going, you see? Either you politicize yourself on your terms, or they will do it for you without asking», maintains Fadi. Indeed, in a situation where migrant groups are in need to often mobilize other collectives to stop evictions, they are often framed under larger political claims. People from SSC opt for defining their own political line and directionality. A matter of choosing the lesser of two evils. In the face of two options, defining one's own claims and mobilizing other support collective around it, is deemed better than being modeled by others. A concern to aspire to and exercise one's own circumscribed autonomy. This also stresses specific co-option dynamics where collectives mobilize other vulnerability for specific political orientation of antagonism against larger structures of control. Whether intended or not,

many undocumented migrants end up politicized without their consent. Absorbing and assimilating the vulnerability of undocumented migrants serves here as a resource to keep the political struggle going, aiming at larger structural changes for the 'oppressed'.

Indeed, without the constitution of a larger dynamic with a collective intentionality (Swerts, 2021), concerned people only get temporary and precarious solutions. What is to be nuanced here is the ambivalence, consensus and consent among people involved on 'who belongs where' as undocumented people are required to be politicized and perhaps extracted in their vulnerability and used as a fuel to larger struggles. Even if potential regularization is seen in the favor of the undocumented, the risk is rendering undocumented migrants at the 'guardianship' of politicized collectives who claim the necessity of maintaining a contentious dimension to squats. «A squat is not made to be comfortable! If occupants are too comfortable, they will sleep. A squat is not a hotel, it is a place where we make struggle and visibility of migrants' problems and the exclusions done by the state. We cannot always wait for the police to expel the occupant. We must create a struggle and claims meanwhile... A squat is not a permanent residence, it is a springboard in the direction of regularization and autonomisation of excluded people». Maintains Khadija, a Moroccan squatter within SSC.

Following Khadija, squats must maintain their

political dimension, it is crucial not to make occupants too comfortable, ensuring that the squat remains a space of struggle and visibility rather than a permanent residence. Also, the precariousness of undocumented individuals is also highlighted, with a lack of existential anchorage resulting from evictions and frequent changes in housing situations. Even sustaining squats for a few months or a year does not alleviate the risk of expulsion. So to deal with the susceptibility to expulsion and the incapacity of the undocumented to sign a lease agreement, SSC struggle for regularization and autonomisation of the undocumented. Indeed, a distinctive aspect of the socio-political condition of the undocumented migrants is their precise juridical status within the larger immigration system in Belgium. While lacking necessary documents or being in the wait of those documents, they find themselves 'enforceable', wherein authorities can enforce legal measures, including expulsion, detention and deportation. Moreover, while the degree to which individuals are subjected to expulsion varies, without the mobilization of politicized collectives undocumented migrants are at higher risks of expulsion. However, to keep solidarity collectives gravitating around a squat, the politicization of the latter and its situation within the larger rhetoric on regularization is deemed inevitable. Specific to the SSC, both documented and undocumented people are sharing the same shelter. Together, they aim for autonomy and to move away from im-

personal aid, often seen in practices where citizen-support provides assistance expeditively to only-undocumented squats. Their (re)definition to paths to regularization and autonomisation transpires from the way they occupy squats. Arranging temporary housing infrastructures to weave meaning and direction toward their aspirations. It is this ephemeral settlement with its discomfort that urges the occupants to think, to plan and to act. Moving from one squat to another, they negotiated and (re)defined senses of dependency and autonomy. In nuancing mixed squats to those functioning as humanitarian corridors, where citizen-led collectives channel their material and logistic support to undocumented migrant-only squats, Adiou, a Congolese undocumented-squatter states the following: «Everyone here does something for others. It's not like some social workers who bring you leftovers at the end of the week. It's not a human zoo where the whites throw a few scraps of food to those trapped in the cage of distress. Getting out of the zoo is entering the cage and deconstructing the dynamics from the inside out».

For SSC, mixity is key. Intended to make-gravitate resources around the squat. It is primarily meant to manifest a prefigured community of different resources. They direct their squats towards norms and values of personal inclusion and solidarity by proximity, as nuanced to institutional integration and impersonal assistance. More than struggling for regularization, they al-

so aim at injecting resources in the squats, attempting to reinforce the autonomy of the dispossessed.

### **Citizen-support collective**

The Citizen-support Collective (hereinafter CSC), an intricate web of collectives and individuals, mainly citizens of Europe, struggling for the rights of undocumented migrants. Central to the network's activities is its engagement in direct actions that consist of monitoring and occupying vacant buildings for unsheltered migrants. Occupying vacant buildings to advocate for regularization campaigns is one of their main vocations. More than logistic support they provide for squats, they often mobilize needed social and institutional resources drawing on their coalitions with individuals holding positions of influence within governmental bodies. This strategic collaboration facilitates access to crucial information and resources such as contact-persons in relevant institutions to act on a given situation or lists of vacant buildings to be used for squatting campaigns. However, unlike SSC, members of the CSC rarely live in the squats where they offer support to migrants.

The citizen-led support has taken center stage since the beginning of the 'reception crisis'. Their knowledge of the context and understating of institutional expectations and their social capital give them an advantageous position in negotiating the upkeep of occupied buildings. More than providing logistical and materi-

al assistance, it is essential for them to convince public authorities of their reliability in maintaining the squats they establish. This is because public authorities typically view undocumented individuals or those operating outside civil society frameworks as unreliable parties to maintaining the convention of a squat. «We cannot rely on the undocumented to manage the squats. Often, we have public health problems, violence and drugs. We prefer to create conventions with citizens' support and allow access for doctors, for social workers and to create security and make sure that the squat won't turn into ruins» says a director of a regional representation in Brussels. Even though SSC and numerous other groups, primarily led by non-citizens and less-established associations have been crucial since the onset of the 'reception crisis', there persists a perception that non-citizens are less reliable compared to citizens operating within established associations and collectives. CSC, with connections to elected officials in multiple municipalities and regional authority, have accumulated resources to take and lead initiatives in supporting undocumented migrants. «Before making squats a living space, we have to play the game of harassing the authorities, using their rhetoric on protection and mitigation of precarity. Illegalized migrants are the case to which we can direct the attention... that is the reason for our existence. Undocumented people are already exhausted! looking for work, overloaded with stress and uncertainty... We take

charge of the mental burden of these negotiations because we have been doing this for a while and we know how to do it... at least we try says Magali, a Belgian citizen, member of CSC.

In CSC's history of action, initiatives carried were mainly the result of the proposition and the implication of the collective members. The involvement of these groups focuses on the concept of 'support'. This stems from their position as predominantly citizens of Europe not directly concerned with exclusion from housing and regularization. Individuals of the collective discuss these relations recurrently. Taking action 'for' the others or 'along with' the others triggers questions on the "white saviorism" among members of the collectives and people directly concerned.

This peculiar solidarity configuration is indeed generative to positions and expectations. The citizen-support collective doesn't necessarily pursue guardianship of the migrants. However, permissiveness toward squats often depends on how well squatters align with administrative expectations. As front-line activists (citizen-support in this case) have contacts to municipalities, alliances with elected officials, and expertise in legal rhetoric regarding protecting vulnerable populations, tolerance for squats appears significantly higher. CSC retains an exclusive position over direct negotiation with authorities, complying with existing expectations on reliable civil society. Citizen-led initiatives' to autonomise migrants often fall short due to

their position in regards to the administrative expectation of them. The line of initiatives have been operating for long as 'providers'. This is due to their incorporation and possession of certain resources and privileges. Transpiring from that is the reinforcement of the institutional stereotypes of the unreliability of migrants in up-keeping a squat. The limited participation of migrants in negotiations with public authorities regarding their personal situation may perpetuate a guardianship dynamic, rendering migrants as annexed individuals whose fate is decided by others. Without a seat at the table, their voices are always lost in translations and echoes. With little capacity to shape the becoming of their squats and, by extension, their own social becoming through squats, illegalized migrants are not seen to prosper beyond the public authority and the citizen support's vision of them. A prevailing intermediation of the citizen-support is crystallized. For non-politicized undocumented migrants involved in this fashion, without this channel of support they risk expulsion as they lack – in the eyes of the authorities – credibility and legitimacy to autonomously negotiate and commit to an eventual convention. This setup questions the practices and the rhetoric of migrants' autonomisation within the larger solidarity landscape in Brussels.

Being caught in the expectations of the migration and reception system is not only the predicament of illegalized migrants. Activist groups with anarchist political orientation sometimes

operate under this umbrella term of citizen support. They are expected to speak conventional rhetoric through their participation in social structures and institutions. Power dynamics with public authorities and illegalized migrants influence the prevailing norms and practices regarding advocacy on issues of vulnerability, urgency, and solidarity. Thus, activist groups often comply with the hegemonic narrative on citizen participation, just as some illegalized migrants adhere to rhetoric emphasizing protection and solidarity towards them.

### **Undocumented squatters**

Illegalized migrants are not only lost in translation and negotiation between the public authorities and citizen support, but they are also subjected to selective support. «Before we had the Blacks, and then Ukrainians and now the Palestinians... It is people who are seeking refuge that deserve priority to squats while they are waiting for their procedures. Like when you go to the emergency at the hospital doctors prioritize patients with cardiovascular issues before addressing those with minor concerns like an infected toe», says Alan, a volunteer in an association in support of squats. This uneven distribution of assistance based on deservingness and scarcity of resources to sustain squats creates a sense of sorting and ranging between those in urgency and those who are not. This is done based on some apprehension of the lived ordeals and selective moral imperatives (Ou-

bad and Mouna, 2023). In practice, this uneven assistance triggers frustrations and tensions among illegalized migrants and established actors of solidarity.

Two cases can illustrate this situation. That of Wadie and Adam. The two are undocumented squatters who navigate the configurations around squats. Since 2016, they have been trapped in irregularity in Brussels, having previously sought asylum and subsequently fallen into undocumented status because they are deemed ineligible to protection as they are coming from Morocco, a so-called safe country of origin. They have lived in occupation along with several collectives and activist groups. Their socio-political condition of uncertainty, lived precarity and attempts to overcome guardianship oriented them to try squatting building aside from vertical assistance-ship and politicized organized collectives.

Accounting for an episode, Wadie testifies «the whites wanted to open a squat for the Palestinians. Us with some Algerians were left aside. We asked for their tools to open a building, but they kept giving us excuses. I knew that they wanted to open the same house I showed them. The same day, I brought a group of people and we forced ourselves in. The whites did not like that. They wanted the Palestinians to be by themselves because they are refugees. At the end they left, and we took the house. When the police came, we had women and children with us. It is winter, they cannot take us out». Wadie and

his group have earned the tricks of the trade. If you have people considered 'vulnerable' and in 'urgency' for shelters such as children and women, then you have a ground on which to temporarily counter expulsion. In fact, the women and children are also undocumented, and they were dwelling temporarily in different places in Brussels. They delegated their wish for a family-only squat to Wadie and thus he engaged in doing so. This was sought both to provide shelter to the mothers and their children and to shield himself and single males seeking a situation in which they can enact their autonomy aside from the political struggle of and vertical assistance. While all undocumented and illegalized individuals are potentially subject to expulsion from squats, not everyone is expelled to the same degree. Those channeling elements associated with norms and values of protection can temporarily oppose expulsions. Channeling their vulnerability and that of others, Wadies and his group managed to make-gravitate other families, women, and children to build a sense of 'urgency' and thus sustain in the squat till the end of the wintertime. Yet, they remain vulnerable to hostile interventions of authorities as they are perceived lacking credibility to sustain a squat.

Not all the undocumented squatters decide to enter in conflict with the organized collective, some seek tactical alliance with these collectives, recognizing the resources these collectives possess. People like Adam have gravitated

around occupations for years and volunteered in eventful moments as intermediators with migrant communities. An incident recounted by Adam involved him discovering an empty house and attempting to squat with his friends. Upon arrival, they encountered Palestinian asylum seekers already present. Although the Palestinians didn't mind Adam and his friend's presence, the collective providing logistic and material support in the squats requested Adam and the others to leave. The argument was that having both asylum seekers and undocumented individuals in the same squat at the moment of the opening increases the risk of hostile evictions by anti-squat police. This is because undocumented people, unlike asylum seekers undergoing determination processes, are not considered deserving of protection of the citizens. Adam left the squat indeed, but he sought to accompany the Palestinians in their daily quest in asylum administrations. With his capacity to speak fluent French and his knowledge of the reception and support landscape he gained significance in being in proximity to the Palestinians. He managed to secure a room in the squat. He is now dwelling there and making his room a sort of 'help desk' where he activates SIM cards, open bank accounts, and interprets asylum related communications and monitors and plans to open other squats for incoming Palestinians. «You know Samaoui, he has done the same. He was in good relations with these associations. He used to lead groups of 60 and 100 people. Now, X asso-

ciation proposed to take him in charge and give him a work contract... he has papers right now.... They (associations) sometimes use migrants for funds, yes! But let's also use them to have papers».

People like Anas and Wadie being themselves undocumented and facing the permanent threat of expulsion either by authorities or by the discretion of the citizen support, they starve to pave their incorporation within the solidarity landscape through revolving around squats. Coupled with frustration linked to impersonal assistance, dependency, and non-consented politicization, they attempt to develop their ways of dwelling, according to their own norms, vision and needs. The result is squatting with a peculiar accent. An accent that cracks the established order (Khosravi, 2024) of solidarity configuration.

### **Producing squats... mobile commons and politics of solidarity negotiated**

The infrastructuration of squats underline that; to quote Papadopoulos and colleagues (Papadopoulos et al., 2008, p. 210), "migrants' material becoming does not end in a new state of being; rather they constitute being as the point of departure on which new becoming emerges". When migrants and their supporters occupy squats, it marks a starting point of their efforts to subvert the exclusion exerted on them through new ways of becoming (Carling and Collins, 2018). They engage in a negotiation process

not only with the migration system's machinery of power and expectation (Foucault, 1975), but also with the foundational principles underpinning assistance and solidarity. The occupation and sustainability of squats defines the terrains on which both undocumented squatters and their allies revolve around the access to right and support. It is through the occupations that norms and practices are negotiated. The nuanced directionalities we identified earlier, underscore how intentions and practices towards specific becomings are shaped within squatting trajectories. While some scholars maintain that precarious migrants' housings are used as an exclusionary mechanism, in the imagination of the neighborhood as well as the nation (Dadusc, 2019; Martinez, 2020), we argue that in our context, squats, with the capacities of their occupants, (re)define and negotiate the praxis around the urban space and who holds agency in its governance. It is through the subjectivities (re)produced within squats and frictions among the inhabitants and their supporters that a critique to the exclusion executed by the migratory system and society at large is asserted. Squatters and their allies often bounce between political and administrative expectations. Citizen-led initiatives, despite applying with reducing hierarchical structures in aid provision, align with the rhetoric of citizen involvement in managing migration, thus playing on the administrative expectation. However, squatters, whether documented or undocumented, residing in

squats embody a prefigurative political stance (Fians, 2022), demonstrating not only struggles for regularisation but also reflection on the praxis of autonomy and assistance. As a result of accumulated frustration linked to vertical assistance and non-consented politicization, some undocumented squatters attempt to function aside from pre-defined collective intentionality (Swerts, 2021). They engage in squatting with a peculiar accent. That of channeling their own vulnerability and that others reduce the risk linked to occupying buildings without citizens' or organised support. Vulnerability rhetoric is their resource. They mobilized it to (re)appropriate a seemingly arranged assistance and solidarity configuration, primarily characterised by expectations regarding migrants' credibility, deservingness and perceived capacity to manage themselves. Their accent is a crack and a critique to the established order (Khosravi, 2024) of solidarity. As we consider these contentious intentions, norms and practices around squats, we see that involved subjects produce mobile commons (Trimiklinioti et al., 2015). While these commons are not marked by coherence and harmonious coalitions, they serve as infrastructures through which broader issues linked to assistance, solidarity and autonomy are negotiated. Indeed, encounters in migratory context are never coherent and harmonious. They are often characterised by frictions and impediments. This is due to the existential predicament of individuals and groups involved. Pro-

ducing a common in such configuration implies negotiating boundaries of practices, as well as giving the possibility to people involved to assert their identities and disruptive intentionality according to their affiliation to the world as (un) documented migrants and as allies and supporters. (re)producing the Common, especially in an abolitionist fashion towards exclusion and segregations "entails world-making processes" (Tazzioli, 2023, p. 14). Hence, (re)producing the Common is about destitution as much as it is about constituent power (Negri, 1999). Squats, as a manifestation of solidarity and of (re)production of the Common are not only spaces allowing migrant liveability in arrival cities, but also stimulate nuanced visions on individual and collective becoming. They question access to right and justice within society at large.

Our account enables us to shift away from solely considering migrants in urban settings in terms of migration control. Instead, it directs our focus towards exploring how migrants make-gravitate assistance, care and solidarity around them as they navigate the city. This emphasizes the transformative power of migrants' agency in shaping social and political cityscapes. A clear manifestation of the autonomy of migration thesis (Mezzadra, 2010; De Genova, 2017) would be our account here of the ways different groups and individuals assess the outcomes of their present position as well as the process of attempting to actualize direction into an uncertain and changeable situation such as occupation



and squats. Rather than being passively controlled by institutional power, migrants alone or with their allies assert agency and autonomy in their squatting practices, sometimes through coalition and some others through friction and contestation. This challenges traditional narratives that portray migration as a problem to be managed or controlled, instead highlighting its role as a dynamic force in the formation and transformation of urban subjects. From here we go towards the relationship between migration, management of urban spaces, and sovereignty, pointing to a shift in perspective that centers the agency and autonomy of migrants in shaping the urban landscape and thus redefining social and political boundaries.

Thus, we raise the question: how the account of the (re)production of alternative dwelling infrastructures for illegalized migrants could contribute to knowledge on the urban commons?

Our research demonstrates that in a context characterized by hostile exclusion of migrants and the delegation of responsibility for their management, numerous alternative and unconventional processes occur to challenge and undermine the perceived injustice. Beyond the issue of the personal interests, political orientations and humanitarian reasons, squatters starve to fill the gap of the reception 'crisis'. By shaping squats, these actors infrastructure a counter-assistance and support in contrast to the conventional actors of the reception and migration system, who rely on institutional notions

of deservingness. To quote Nancy Fraser; they shape a counter-public space that operates as an underlying arena where squatters and their supporters invent and circulate norms and practices of solidarity, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs (Fraser, 1990:67). These dynamics lead to the formation of alternative directionalities about ways solidarity is produced, articulated, and mediated. Instead of merely operating within the established relations of assistance and support, squatters and their allies craft their own politics of solidarity. They actively forge and shape new forms of acts, and produce a specific circuit of access to accommodation and to regularization, with attention to verticality, guardianship and impersonal assistance. Through squatting vacant buildings the asylum and immigration management in the city is contested. These acts open alternatives and cracks within such selective machinery of eligibility determination. The status quo is challenged, offering a tangible alternative to the dominant institutional narrative on deservingness. Squatting emerges as a response to the exclusionary policies that often accompany migration. These spaces become sites of common resistance (Cañas, 2020) where individuals assert not only their right to housing and livelihood but also to emancipation and autonomy. By reclaiming physical spaces, squatters also reclaim the social and political dimensions of everyday life. The encounters of citizen-led support col-

lectives and (il)legalized migrants around squats opens on various commoning practices, and thereby a (re)definition of politics of solidarity employed to create, manage and sustain informal dwelling infrastructures in Brussels. Squatted spaces become incubators for alternative forms of community and organization, where diverse individuals negotiate new possibilities for collective becoming.

While the infrastructuring of squats is told often through rhetoric of altruistic support or politicization of subjects without personal interests, in practice, both citizen-led initiatives and migrant collectives, comprising both documented and undocumented squatters, frequently encounter predicament of appropriation, guardianship and personal interests. Despite the tension transpiring from these challenges, they often strive solidarity and claim larger structural changes or social becoming (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013). Be that for humanitarian reasons, for political antagonism, for a quest of recognition or to tackle the urging insecurity of expulsion, detention and deportation risks (as it is the case of independent undocumented squatters) each group navigates this moving terrain (Vigh, 2009) with a specific intention. These intentions are not static, they are continuously shaped and modeled through specific encounters and confrontations.

The Common we are accounting here gains its features through a rhizomatic development (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013). In a mobile, dif-

fuse and fluid manner, transcending predefined boundaries. In this framework, the squats as mobile commons stimulate the creation of supportive settings that facilitate migrants' navigation and appropriation of urban space and its politics. These elements, therefore, play a vital role in shaping the mobile commons within urban landscapes. They enable the circulation and expansion of solidarity. In essence, the different directionalities of solidarity within the mobile commons described here not only enable migrants to assert agency and autonomy but also redefine the socio-political parameters of the urban environment and ethical precepts regarding property and sovereignty associated with it.

### Conclusion

Squatting in migratory contexts is a phenomenon deeply rooted in notions of solidarity and resistance (Mezzadra, 2010; Martinez, 2020). Beyond the differences in dynamics, the three cases we have described in this article play an underlying common pattern, that is the production of mobile commons and the negotiation of norms and practices as a constitutive force of survival and resistance within the selective migration regime. Being in squats implies some degrees of infrastructuring practices, shaping the directionality of the squat. Squats are not fixedly bound to pre-defined social and spatial arrangement; rather, they are oriented towards a social becoming, as squatters adjust their relative engagements towards specific commit-

ments for diverse reasons (Meeus et al., 2019). In the case of SSC, multiplication of resources through mixity and the politicisation of the subjects is the direction sought. Beyond struggling for regularisation, SSC aims to mitigate their dependency on impersonal assistance. Conversely, CSC holds the position of 'supporter'. Without sharing the same shelter with the undocumented migrants, they position their intervention as intermediators with authorities and a message to incorporate excluded migrants in specific municipalities. Aside from organized collectives, undocumented squatters seek self-incorporation aside from structured interventions. Frustrated with impersonal assistance and non-consensual politicization, they seek to develop their own ways of doing, attempting potential transformation through incorporation around squats. Migration involves the appropriation of space and its politics. Illegalised migrant squatters often find themselves marginalized and stigmatized, perceived both as 'invaders' of state sovereignty without requisite authorization and as occupants of private property lacking conventional property rights. Consequently, their living spaces exist within a complex network of relations with broader society and its institutions, which simultaneously control, categorize, and occasionally manage these spaces. This intricate interplay underscores the multifaceted nature of squats as sites of contestation and survival strategies deeply embedded within broader socio-political and urban dynamics.

As migrants and their allies pursue settlement and inclusion, they produce and negotiate urban spaces. Squats in urban border zones like Brussels illustrate this, where illegalized migrants, often denied institutional reception, assert their right to the city and critique their marginalized existence. Institutional reception structures, part of a broader migration industry (Cf. Hernández-León, 2013), filter those deemed deserving based on securitarian and legal criteria. By occupying squats, migrants challenge these hierarchies and reclaim their right to the city, effectively subverting exclusionary urban policies. This resonates with Lefebvre's conception of democratized urban spaces, wherein all inhabitants, regardless of legal status, can participate in and shape their environment. The act of squatting itself serves as a direct challenge to the prevailing socio-political frameworks governing urban spaces in relation to migrants, prompting a reevaluation of the legitimacy of exclusionary policies and practices. Through asserting their right to the city, migrant squatters not only assert their presence in the urban landscape but also push for a negotiation of their social becoming.

What we find particularly interesting about these distinct situations is that squats are not a mere vacuum filled with dwelling people, they are rather spaces actively shaped by the interplay of social relation, constantly evolving and susceptible to subversion and alternations. The attempts to produce and maintain the squats

as a common bring about tension and negotiations in the social fabric of situations in arrival cities. We could say that it is not so much a matter of housing the excluded, but of building a common with the Other; the recognition of power relations and aspiration to autonomy takes precedence over that of humanitarian relations. Of course, it can be contended that this kind of shaping the common takes subjective preferences into account, thus reproducing dividing lines and moving geometries of coalition within specific migrant-citizen communities. However, we believe that this social terrain is the most fertile soil in which to observe seeds of alternative commoning grow. Identify how the common forms, moves and transform across the ordinary social interactions and relations within alternative dwelling infrastructures give dignity to actually existing underground practices of commonings. At the end, as Angela Davis contends, the existing tensions are not to be “torn down, but to be built up, and bring about alternative configuration” (Davis, 2010, p.23).

The significance of this account lies in its elucidation of unconventional interactions that disrupt exclusion and construct alternative commonings to bridge inclusion. Our exploration unveiled the potential of squats in not only (re) producing and negotiating commons of care and solidarity, but also as catalyst for migrants' agency and performative citizenship (Isin, 2017). By describing these interactions we propose directing the gaze to underground circuits invent-

ing norms and practices around commoning practices. All things considered, the reflection on the agency of migrants and their supporters in (re)producing the common have shown its potential in encouraging a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding solidarity configurations in migratory contexts.

## Note

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# Le bambine e i bambini come soggetti attivi della cura dei luoghi: il caso del Contratto di Fiume Ombrone

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## Introduzione: le bambine e i bambini come attori trasformativi

Negli ultimi anni l'evoluzione del concetto di educazione ha visto le strutture scolastiche aprirsi al territorio e alla comunità locale con un movimento di scuole generative (Rossi, 2021) che si uniscono per costruire un'alternativa dal basso. L'impostazione tradizionale della scuola, rispondente alla mera funzione di trasferimento di conoscenza, sta lasciando spazio ad una scuola aperta ed inclusiva, interpretata come un'alleanza tra scuola e territorio. Si tratta infatti di un'alternativa fondata su un percorso educati-

vo che riguarda, da un lato, all'acquisizione di conoscenze e, dall'altro, alla formazione dei membri di una comunità. Una dimensione innovativa di scuola civica, intesa come spazio di incontro e di integrazione tra territorio, università, associazioni locali ed istituzioni che cura la dimensione pubblica e co-progetta gli spazi educativi e di vita (Del Bene et al, 2021).

In questo senso è verosimile considerare la scuola come

*Children have long been recognised as capable thinkers and active participants in shared educational experiences. However, in spatial planning practices they are often viewed as mere users of a dedicated space.*

*This contribution presents an action-research experience that retraces the empowerment process of the children in a municipality. It does so through the restitution of the projects resulting from the co-construction of a River Agreement. The aim is to adopt a new perspective that views children*



*as agents of transformation, as active members of the community and its empowerment process, advocates for recognition pathways, and stewards of commons.*

*To this end, the conclusions suggest promoting cooperative planning models with a social function that welcomes children as active participants in the care of public spaces and the promotion of social initiatives.*

luogo di pratiche di cura e di comunità inclusive, in grado di sviluppare un sistema educativo cooperativo, in cui il ruolo dell'educazione compete parimenti alla scuola e a tutti gli attori presenti sul territorio. La scuola assume, quindi, in modo diffuso il suo ruolo educativo e formativo di comunità educante (Dewey, 2004 ed.1916; Zamenigo & Valenzano, 2018; Sergiovanni, 2000).

Questo approccio vede numerose esperienze oggi attive in Italia. Molte di queste si ispirano al manifesto per le "scuole aperte" (Del Bene et al, 2021): i) la rete, ormai diffusa, delle "Scuole aperte" delle esperienze di Roma e di Milano per l'educazione condivisa (Cantisani, 2004; Rossi Doria et al, 2019); ii) le scuole che stanno sperimentando un modello di città educante ed applicando il manifesto dell'educazione diffusa (Mottana, Campagnoli, 2017); iii) le scuole che, a partire dalla sperimentazione di Milano, hanno preso parte ai patti educativi territoriali (PET) e che promuovono una visione di scuola come be-

ne pubblico e luogo di conoscenza e di sviluppo di capitale umano (Rossi, 2021).

Analogamente alle esperienze di comunicazione tra scuola e territorio sopra citate, sono attive numerose sperimentazioni di coinvolgimento delle scuole nelle molteplici esperienze di sussidiarietà orizzontale, tra cui i patti di collaborazione; le società locali del cibo, più legate alla dimensione urbana; gli ecomusei ed i Contratti di Fiume, riferiti alla prospettiva di area vasta. In queste pratiche le bambine e i bambini sono parte attiva del processo di coinvolgimento della comunità.

Muovendo dalle esperienze di progettazione partecipata trattate in letteratura sul coinvolgimento delle bambine e dei bambini nelle scelte decisionali (Tonucci, 1996; Francis, Lorenzo, 2003; Paba, Pecoriello, 2006; Poli, 2006; Magagnoli, 2010), il contributo si colloca nel solco dell'interpretazione delle bambine e dei bambini intesi come agenti portatori di esigenze ed in grado di prender parte alle scelte decisionali (Paba, 2003). Interpretando le bambine e i bambini come soggetti sociali competenti (Juul, 2003; Paba, Pecoriello, 2006) e come attori trasformativi del processo in azione, il contributo presenta una rilettura dell'esperienza di ricerca-azione per la costruzione di un Contratto di Fiume (CdF)

## Timeline del percorso di empowerment delle bambine e dei bambini del fiume Ombrone

Fonte: a cura dell'autrice  
Fig.1

attraverso i laboratori nelle scuole, al fine di proporre una riflessione sul ruolo che le bambine e i bambini possono avere nella presa di coscienza dei beni comuni territoriali e nella costruzione di comunità inclusive in grado di inter-agire tra territorio e comunità.

Non è più sufficiente, infatti, riconoscere loro il ruolo di portatori di un pensiero compiuto, di soggetti di percorsi di informazione coinvolti in esperienze episodiche; è necessario invece riconoscere loro il ruolo di attrici e di attori di un processo di elaborazione collettiva e permanente.

A quasi trenta anni dalla pubblicazione della "Città dei Bambini" (1996) in cui è stato introdotto in letteratura il concetto di città a misura di bambino (Tonucci, 1996; 2002) e dal Manifesto della "Città Bambina" (Paba, Pecoriello, 2006) molte amministrazioni ed associazioni hanno sperimentato pratiche e processi partecipativi. Sebbene negli anni le esperienze siano cresciute ed evolute, si riscontra, tuttavia, la necessità di porre tali pratiche in una visione di processo permanente e generativo, che si discosti dalla dimensione occasionale e riferita soltanto a tematiche limitate e alla consultazione puntuale, così come auspicato anche dalla Convenzione dei diritti dell'Infanzia e dell'Adolescenza delle Nazioni Unite (1989).

Tali principi sono attuati anche nelle molteplici attività del programma "Città Amiche dei bambini e degli adolescenti", promosso dall'UNICEF e dal Programma delle Nazioni Unite, che coinvolge 30 milioni di bambine e bambini il tutto il

mondo. Nel 2003 lo stesso Comitato delle Nazioni Unite sui diritti dell'infanzia e dell'adolescenza ha ribadito, infatti, la necessità di coinvolgere attivamente le bambine e i bambini nella partecipazione ai processi decisionali.

Il contributo interpreta le bambine e i bambini come parte attiva della comunità operante e del suo processo di empowerment, promotori di percorsi di riconoscimento e soggetti della cura dei beni comuni (Magnaghi, 2012; 2020).

Attraverso la rilettura dell'esperienza di ricerca-azione, condotta dall'Università di Firenze con le scuole per la costruzione del Contratto di Fiume Ombrone, il contributo ripercorre il cammino delle bambine e dei bambini nella realizzazione di una rinnovata comunità rivierasca che sviluppa un processo di presa di coscienza verso il bene comune fiume.

Il contributo tenta di restituire i risultati del percorso quinquennale suddivisi in tre distinte fasi progettuali e temporali utilizzate per indagare il processo di empowerment delle bambine e dei bambini.

Nelle conclusioni il contributo mette in luce due aspetti principali del percorso: da un lato, l'importanza di coinvolgere le bambine e i bambini delle fasce di età prescolare nella presa di coscienza degli elementi valoriali nella reidentificazione collettiva del bene comune; dall'altro, la potenzialità del percorso di empowerment delle scuole coinvolte nella formazione di una rinnovata comunità di cura.



### Le bambine e i bambini del Fiume Ombrone: il caso studio

Il contributo approfondisce l'esperienza di ricerca-condotta tra gli anni 2017/2022 a partire dalla costruzione di un Contratto di Fiume (CdF) promosso da un piccolo comitato locale toscano e che innesca un percorso di *empowerment* delle bambine e dei bambini dell'intero bacino fluviale (3.494 chilometri quadrati) attraverso i laboratori nelle scuole.

In questo contesto il CdF è uno strumento integrato di *governance* che si configura come un accordo volontario fra soggetti pubblici e privati, finalizzato alla cura e alla valorizzazione del fiume. Il fiume è dunque frutto di processi coevolutivi di lunga durata e inteso bene comune (Magnaghi, 2012).

L'interesse del contributo ricade sul processo in azione delle bambine e dei bambini e, in particolare, sull'evoluzione del loro ruolo: da piccole e piccoli cittadini che partecipano a una attività formativa, si trasformano in agenti del cambiamento che incidono sulle scelte decisionali del proprio Comune e ne orientano le strategie.

Il *focus* dell'indagine esamina l'esperienza del Comune di Buonconvento (Provincia di Siena) che, dai laboratori di costruzione del CdF, innesca un processo di *empowerment* dei giovani generando un impatto concreto sugli adulti e sull'am-

ministrazione comunale concorrendo anche allo sviluppo dell'apprendimento istituzionale.

I laboratori con le scuole segnano, inoltre, un'importante punto di svolta per lo sviluppo di una coscienza rivierasca e per la concretizzazione di un senso di appartenenza al fiume percepito come elemento valoriale e legato ad una visione unitaria del territorio.

Per facilitare la lettura di tale processo il contributo sintetizza il percorso in tre diverse fasi temporali dal 2017 al 2022 in cui i laboratori nelle scuole sono rivolti a soggetti diversi e di differenti fasce d'età.

La *prima fase* si riferisce all'innescò del percorso: nel 2017 prende avvio il processo partecipativo "OSIAMO! Verso il Contratto di Fiume Ombrone" cofinanziato dall'Autorità regionale per la garanzia e la promozione della partecipazione (APP) della Regione Toscana, ai sensi della L.R. 46/2013, e dal Dipartimento di Architettura (DI-DA) dell'Università di Firenze.

Il Contratto di Fiume Ombrone è promosso da un piccolo comitato che, superando la logica *nimby* (Lingua, 2014), diventa soggetto innovatore di pratiche in collaborazione con il DIDA dell'Università di Firenze. A seguito dei due eventi alluvionali del 2013 e del 2015, l'attività del comitato si concentra su tematiche comuni alle popolazioni rivierasche e sul loro rapporto con il fiume

Azioni	Sotto Azioni	Target partecipanti
1. La comunità fluviale tra passato e futuro	1.1. "Il mio fiume è un patrimonio"	Alunne e alunni della Scuola Primaria
	1.2 "La banca della memoria fluviale"	Alunne e alunni della Scuola Secondaria di primo grado
	1.3 "Osiamo ancora: le scuole si incontrano" prosecuzione progetto formativo del processo partecipativo "OSIAMO! Verso il contratto di fiume Ombrone"	Gemellaggio tra le alunne e gli alunni della Scuola Primaria e della Scuola Secondaria di primo grado di Buonconvento e di Cinigiano
2. Fiumi e nuove economie: traggiamo l'Ombrone al futuro	2. "Rappresentare e valorizzare gli elementi patrimoniali"	Studentesse e studenti dell'Istituto Tecnico Economico di Siena
3. La porta del parco fluviale dell'Ombrone	3. "Progettazione della porta fisica e virtuale del parco"	Studentesse e studenti universitari

## Azioni e sotto-azioni del progetto: "OSIAMO! Le giovani generazioni verso il contratto di fiume Ombrone. Conoscenza e valorizzazione del patrimonio fluviale dell'Ombrone e dell'Arbia"

Fonte: a cura dell'autrice

Tab.1

quali, ad esempio: gli impatti degli eventi alluvionali; la messa in sicurezza delle aree urbane; la percezione del rischio da parte degli abitanti.

Dalla *partnership* tra università e comunità prende avvio un processo di apprendimento collettivo che pone le giovani generazioni al centro del percorso di elaborazione di una *vision* di territorio condivisa.

Il gruppo di ricerca, tramite l'utilizzo dello strumento dello scenario<sup>1</sup> che si concretizza attraverso una discesa di scala verso la dimensione locale, individua in un'ottica transcale due Comuni pilota (Pisano, Lingua, 2022) in cui articola i *workshop* di progettazione partecipata con gli adulti e le scuole: il Comune di Buonconvento, nella provincia di Siena ed il Comune di Cinigiano, nella provincia di Grosseto.

Il processo partecipativo è curato da un professionista esterno e si scandisce in parallelo al processo di *visioning* curato dal DIDA che ve-

de i ricercatori lavorare per definire una visione condivisa della Valle dell'Ombrone, coinvolgendo anche le scuole nel processo in azione (Caruso et al, 2020).

Le bambine e i bambini assumono fin da subito un ruolo cardine nel processo di partecipazione e sono parte di un ricco calendario di laboratori con le scuole di ogni ordine e grado<sup>2</sup>.

In un primo momento probabilmente nessuno, né il comitato né il gruppo di ricerca, si aspettava che il coinvolgimento delle bambine e dei bambini diventasse l'elemento trasformativo e generativo del percorso di costruzione del CdF.

La *seconda* fase è determinata da un nuovo progetto promosso dal comitato locale e finanziato dalla Fondazione Monte dei Paschi di Siena: "OSIAMO! Le giovani generazioni verso il contratto di fiume Ombrone. Conoscenza e valorizzazione del patrimonio fluviale dell'Ombrone e dell'Arbia". Questo progetto vede coinvolte

<b>Fase 1</b>	
<b>Progetto: "OSIAMO! Verso il Contratto di Fiume Ombrone"</b>	
Soggetto Attuatore	Comitato Buonconvento su finanziamento Autorità per la partecipazione e Università di Firenze
Facilitatore	DIDA
Età dei partecipanti	Dai 3 ai 5 anni
Finalità del Progetto	Promuovere coscienza di appartenenza al fiume e firma protocollo d'intesa CdF
Obiettivi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>sviluppare una coscienza di luogo attraverso il riconoscimento del fiume come elemento di valore e bene comune;</li> <li>elaborare progetti alla scala comunale sviluppando la capacità di inserire le progettualità in una dimensione territoriale di sistema fluviale;</li> <li>crescita della cittadinanza attiva e creazione di reti intergenerazionali per attivare forme di cooperazione tra i bambini e i cittadini che hanno partecipato ai workshop di progettazione partecipata e le istituzioni.</li> </ul>
Area di riferimento	Comuni pilota: Scuole di Buonconvento e Cinigiano
Attività	Laboratori nelle scuole nido, infanzia, primarie e secondarie di primo grado
Periodo di svolgimento	2017 - 2018
<b>Fase 2</b>	
<b>Progetto: "OSIAMO! Le giovani generazioni verso il contratto di fiume Ombrone. Conoscenza e valorizzazione del patrimonio fluviale dell'Ombrone e dell'Arbia"</b>	
Soggetto Attuatore	Comitato Buonconvento su finanziamento FMPS e Università di Firenze
Facilitatore	DIDA
Età dei partecipanti	Dai 6 ai 25 anni
Finalità del Progetto	Costruire una comunità rivierasca del Fiume Ombrone
Obiettivi	<p>costruire e rafforzare la comunità rivierasca a partire dalle nuove generazioni come catalizzatrici dell'intero tessuto sociale locale, in un'ottica intergenerazionale;</p> <p>convergere verso nuove forme di valorizzazione del fiume Ombrone e dei suoi affluenti per l'attivazione del Contratto di Fiume;</p> <p>promuovere la crescita della cittadinanza attiva e la creazione di reti intergenerazionali per attivare forme di cooperazione tra bambini, cittadinanza attiva ed istituzioni.</p>
Area di riferimento	Bacino idrografico del fiume Ombrone
Attività	Laboratori nelle scuole primarie, secondarie di primo grado superiori e Summer School Università
	2019/2021
<b>Fase 3</b>	
<b>Progetto: "Buonconvento futura è oggi. Il Consiglio dei Ragazzi per un futuro condiviso"</b>	
Soggetto Attuatore	Comune di Buonconvento su finanziamento Autorità per la partecipazione
Facilitatore	Società Cantieri Animati. Comunicazione e partecipazione
Età dei partecipanti	Primaria e Secondaria di primo grado
Finalità del Progetto	Costituire il Consiglio comunale dei Ragazzi
Obiettivi	<p>creare una struttura di governance inclusiva, che pone particolare attenzione alla piena parità di espressione di tutti i punti di vista e di eguaglianza di accesso al dibattito pubblico, compresi quelli dei bambini;</p> <p>sensibilizzare il mondo adulto nei confronti dei bisogni degli adolescenti, particolarmente colpiti dalle disposizioni di distanziamento sociale causate dalla pandemia.</p>
Area di riferimento	Comune di Buonconvento
Attività	Laboratori
Periodo di svolgimento	2022

## Sintesi delle fasi dei progetti

Fonte: a cura dell'autrice

Tab. 2

	Fasce età	Strumenti
<b>Fase 1- 2017-2018</b> Progetto: "OSIAMO! Verso il Contratto di Fiume Ombrone"	Asili nido 1- 4 anni	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scatola azzurra</li> <li>• Mappa di Gulliver su lenzuolo</li> </ul>
	Scuola Primaria e secondaria di primo grado 4 - 14 anni	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mappa affettiva</li> <li>• Passeggiate</li> <li>• Mappa di Gulliver su supporto cartaceo</li> <li>• Focus progettuali con <i>collage</i></li> </ul>
<b>Fase 2 - 2019-2021</b> Progetto: "OSIAMO! Le giovani generazioni verso il contratto di fiume Ombrone. Conoscenza e valorizzazione del patrimonio fluviale dell'Ombrone e dell'Arbia"	Scuola Primaria e secondaria di primo grado 4 - 14 anni	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mappa affettiva</li> <li>• Passeggiate</li> <li>• Mappa di Gulliver su supporto cartaceo</li> <li>• Focus progettuali con <i>collage</i></li> <li>• interviste strutturate e <i>brainstorming</i></li> </ul>
	Scuola secondaria e Università dai 15 anni	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passeggiate</li> <li>• Co-planning - seminari tematici DIDA</li> <li>• Progettazione della porta del parco (Buonconvento) - Summer School</li> <li>• Contest La porta del parco: realizzazione del progetto vincitore</li> </ul>
<b>Fase 3 - 2022</b> Progetto: "Buonconvento futura è oggi. Il Consiglio dei Ragazzi per un futuro condiviso"	Scuola secondaria di primo grado	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seminario per i docenti</li> <li>• Workshop con gioco di ruolo</li> <li>• Elezioni per Istituzione del Consiglio Comunale dei ragazzi</li> </ul>

le scuole dell'intero bacino fluviale e gli studenti del DIDA, coinvolgendo la fascia d'età tra i 6 ed i 25 anni<sup>3</sup>. Il progetto segue il processo generativo del precedente percorso ed è ancorato al piano d'azione del CdF; si focalizza sulle giovani generazioni quali garanti del processo di riconoscimento e trasmissione del valore patrimoniale del fiume Ombrone e dei suoi affluenti.

È organizzato in tre azioni e cinque sotto azioni indirizzate alle diverse scuole e fasce di età coinvolte. L'azione "La comunità fluviale tra passato e futuro" prevede il coinvolgimento delle scuole primarie e secondarie e si articola in tre sotto-azioni; l'azione "Fiumi e nuove economie: traggiamoci l'Ombrone al futuro", interessa i giovani nella fascia di età dai 15 ai 18 dell'Istituto Tecnico Economico di Siena (Tab.1)<sup>4</sup>.

La *terza* fase è rappresentata dall'evoluzione del processo di *empowerment*, che si discosta dal

CdF e che genera nuovi progetti. In un'ottica di governance inclusiva nasce, infatti, nel 2021 il processo partecipativo "Buonconvento futura è oggi. Il consiglio dei ragazzi per un futuro condiviso" promosso dal Comune di Buonconvento e finanziato dall'APP della Regione Toscana.

Il progetto coinvolge gli alunni delle scuole primarie e secondarie e si estende alle sedi istituzionali: attraverso l'istituzione del Consiglio Comunale dei Ragazzi (CCR) le giovani generazioni sono parte dell'attività amministrativa.

Il percorso di *empowerment* delle bambine e dei bambini è sintetizzato nella seguente Tabella.

### **Metodologia: i laboratori nella fascia di età tra i 1 e i 15 anni**

Il lavoro dei ricercatori si muove in una cornice di ricerca-azione e di mutuo apprendimento, vede infatti coinvolti anche gli studenti del DIDA in

molteplici attività di studio e di animazione con la comunità.

Gli strumenti applicati nei laboratori nelle scuole costituiscono un approccio sperimentale alla costruzione di scenari condivisi di area vasta con le scuole. Tuttavia, gli strumenti adottati differiscono in base alle diverse età (Tab. 3).

Le attività proposte sono rivolte alla sperimentazione di strumenti e tecniche mirate e finalizzate ad esplicitare il valore patrimoniale del fiume Ombrone e dei suoi affluenti, attraverso lo sguardo delle bambine e dei bambini. In questo contesto risulta infatti essere una condizione necessaria allontanare gli stereotipi degli adulti dal pensiero dei giovani partecipanti e invitare le bambine e i bambini a riflettere sulle loro emozioni, sulla loro esperienza e sul racconto delle storie vissute.

In seguito, si descrive la metodologia applicata nelle attività dei laboratori con le scuole delle prime due fasi, dal 2017 al 2021, facilitati dai ricercatori del DIDA.

Al fine di proporre un approccio transcalare integrato, sono stati sperimentati strumenti di rappresentazione diversi per ciascuna scala cercando di testare sistemi di narrazione sperimentali in ambito della pianificazione di area vasta.

Gli strumenti utilizzati per lavorare con gli asili nido dal 2017 al 2018 sono studiati specificatamente per questo tipo di età e differiscono tra quello di Buonconvento e quello di Cinigiano.

In riferimento al caso specifico dell'asilo nido di Buonconvento, è stata organizzata una prima

camminata sensoriale lungo il fiume, graficizzata nel secondo incontro su una "Mappa di Gulliver"<sup>5</sup> e realizzata su lenzuolo bianco con piedi e mani. Il gioco di animazione ha permesso di rielaborare le emozioni e l'esperienza vissute dalle bambine e dai bambini durante la passeggiata. L'attività ha visto, inoltre, coinvolti i genitori in un *workshop* pomeridiano con un'attività laboratoriale genitori-Figli al fine di condividere le emozioni secondo un mutuo apprendimento, realizzando ed ultimando la mappa.

Per il caso di Cinigiano, non essendo possibile organizzare l'uscita vista la lontananza dal Fiume Ombrone, si è provveduto a far conoscere e vivere l'esperienza sensoriale con un'innovativa tecnica di manipolazione, sperimentata per la prima volta in un percorso partecipativo per la costruzione di un CdF: "la scatola azzurra" di impronta Montessoriana (Caruso, 2019). Attraverso l'utilizzo e la manipolazione degli elementi naturali che compongono il sistema fluviale, le bambine e i bambini hanno costruito nella scatola un paesaggio fluviale con sabbia, acqua, terra, erba e animali giocattolo.

Nelle due esperienze presso gli asili nido si è riusciti a coinvolgere attivamente bambini nella fascia di età 1-3 anni e, attraverso la destrutturazione delle loro realizzazioni, è stato possibile focalizzare alcuni elementi progettuali ed una *vision* condivisa di paesaggio.

Gli strumenti e le tecniche di rappresentazione adottati con le scuole hanno permesso di sviluppare una progettualità inattesa che ha amplia-

to l'immaginazione delle bambine e dei bambini da una dimensione precisata nello spazio e nel tempo, ad una più ampia a scala territoriale e di lunga durata.

Le attività di seguito descritte riguardano, invece, i laboratori con le scuole sperimentati dal 2017 al 2021 nella fascia d'età 4-14 anni.

Le attività sono organizzate in tre laboratori di circa due ore per ciascuna classe: i) laboratorio conoscitivo e analitico; ii) sopralluogo sul fiume; iii) laboratorio progettuale.

Le attività sono animate dal facilitatore urbanista attraverso tecniche di *cooperative learning* e *planning for real*. Durante le passeggiate sono coinvolte anche le guide ambientali allo scopo da un lato, di riscoprire gli elementi caratterizzanti il paesaggio del fiume come elemento patrimoniale e identitario e, dall'altro, di creare una conoscenza condivisa.

Il laboratorio conoscitivo e analitico riguarda la realizzazione della mappa affettiva dei luoghi, attraverso la somministrazione di un questionario a carattere esperienziale. Avvicinandosi al concetto di luogo come spazio fisico, ambientale e sociale, le bambine e i bambini sono chiamati ad individuare su una Carta Tecnica Regionale il luogo più bello, quello più brutto, quello più pauroso e più pericoloso. Terminata questa attività i piccoli partecipanti sono invitati a rappresentare, con tecnica libera, i loro luoghi del cuore o i loro desideri cercando di rispondere alla domanda del questionario che chiede loro cosa cambieresti del tuo Comune.

Graficizzare la mappa affettiva ha un duplice obiettivo: da un lato, quello di far acquisire una coscienza della dimensione spaziale e, dall'altro, quello di individuare gli elementi identitari e i pericoli percepiti dalle bambine e dai bambini come, ad esempio, nel caso di Buonconvento, gli argini non accessibili, gli attraversamenti pedonali e la strada Cassia non sicuri. Tracciare tali elementi e mappare le criticità rappresenta un momento di riflessione e dibattito per le bambine e i bambini e per i facilitatori può successivamente diventare materiale di lavoro per individuare le progettualità da approfondire.

Il sopralluogo sul fiume è strutturato in modo differenziato per le fasce di età dei partecipanti e articolato in una camminata progettuale, dove individuare le idee e misurarsi con gli spazi di vita reali per alcune classi, mentre per altre classi, la camminata ha una vocazione più a carattere naturalistico ambientale.

Il laboratorio progettuale riguarda la definizione e la graphicizzazione delle progettualità con l'utilizzo di tecniche plurime (disegno tecnico e/o a mano libera, collage ecc.), al fine di realizzare progetti multiscalari. Alla scala comunale i progetti sono graphicizzati su una "Mappa di Gulliver": si tratta di un lavoro di gruppo su una base libera e fuori scala, per le classi della scuola primaria, su basi cartografiche in scala 1:2.000 (Carta Tecnica Regionale o foto aerea) prevalentemente per le classi della scuola secondaria di primo grado.

Alla scala puntuale le progettualità sono grafi-





## La scatola azzurra

Fonte: fotografia dell'autrice  
Fig.2



## La mappa affettiva della scuola primaria di Buonconvento

Fonte: fotografia dell'autrice  
Fig.3



## Sintesi proposte progettuali scuole di Buonconvento

Fig.4



## Masterplan condiviso

Fonte: fotografia dell'autrice

Fig.5

cizzate su riproduzioni di fotografie con tecnica di collage<sup>6</sup> attraverso un lavoro individuale.

Per le scuole primarie di secondo grado, che hanno preso parte al progetto nella seconda fase, sono state sperimentate anche interviste strutturate e *brainstorming*. Le ragazze e i ragazzi sono stati chiamati ad individuare le attività che storicamente si svolgevano in ambito rivierasco e assumevano il fiume come elemento di vita. Gli incontri con i testimoni privilegiati, depositari della memoria storica locale, sono stati finalizzati alla raccolta di racconti di storie di vita e di vecchi mestieri, utili alla formazione di una banca della memoria fluviale.

Per questi laboratori i risultati finali non riguardano soltanto la conoscenza del fiume come elemento valoriale, ma includono anche la conoscenza delle storie di vita attorno al fiume e la costruzione di una memoria collettiva.

## Il processo di *empowerment*:

### i risultati dei progetti

Per meglio analizzare i risultati dei laboratori ed il percorso di *empowerment* è utilizzato come *focus* di indagine il caso studio del Comune di Buonconvento.

### *Fase 1 Progetto: "OSIAMO! Verso il Contratto di Fiume Ombrone"*

Dai laboratori nel Comune di Buonconvento sono stati prodotti: una mappatura del fiume a cura dell'asilo nido; un totale di 6 mappe affettive, 3 mappe di Gulliver e *focus* progettuali individuali. Da questi elaborati sono emerse varie progettualità inerenti alla sicurezza fluviale, la percorribilità e fruibilità del territorio, la creazione di nuovi spazi di aggregazione e la riqualificazione degli spazi verdi attrezzati esistenti, la promozione di progetti didattici nelle scuole (Fig.4). In

Sintesi delle progettualità emerse	Azioni Piano D'azione
Accesso al fiume per navigazione e balneazione	Azione Pilota "AP1 Progetto Buonconvento"
Nuova area umida: piscina naturale all'interno dell'argine con area pesca con postazioni per i pescatori	
Parco Fluviale con pista ciclabile pavimentata facilitare l'accesso ai disabili	Azione Pilota "AP1 Progetto Buonconvento" "IS8 Aree ricreative attrezzate"
Orti didattici in prossimità del fiume	Interventi strutturali ANS4 progetti didattici nelle scuole
Area cani lungo il fiume	Azione Pilota "AP1 Progetto Buonconvento"
Area pic-nic in prossimità del parco fluviale area giochi per bambini piccoli	Azione Pilota "AP1 Progetto Buonconvento"
Progetti didattici per le scuole	Azione non strutturale "ANS4 Progetti didattici nelle scuole" "CF5 ampliamento coinvolgimento"
Riapertura piscina comunale e miglioramento degli impianti sportivi e recupero del vecchio campo sportivo e spogliatoi	
Interventi di moderazione del traffico su via Cassia con installazione di semafori a chiamata	
Messa in sicurezza degli argini	Interventi strutturali "IS1 Argine di Piana" "IS2 Argine Coop"
Mobilità lenta (piste ciclabili e sentieristica)	Interventi strutturali "IS9 percorsi di fruizione lenta"

particolare la realizzazione di un parco fluviale accessibile ai disabili con area pesca, accesso al fiume per la balneazione, orti didattici, area pic-nic ed area gioco, area cani; la realizzazione di piste ciclabili e di una sentieristica all'interno del parco; l'attuazione di interventi di moderazione del traffico sulla via Cassia ed installazione di semafori a chiamata; riapertura della piscina comunale e miglioramento degli impianti sportivi; recupero del vecchio campo sportivo e spogliatoi.

La *vision* delle bambine e dei bambini si concentra su parchi giochi in prossimità del fiume e delle scuole e su attrezzature sportive collegate tra loro da reti di percorsi di mobilità dolce. Da questi emergono anche le ipotesi di percorribilità fluviali sia lungo gli argini sia internamente, attraverso la navigazione dello stesso fiume Ombrone. All'interno del tema delle percorrenze acquista forte importanza la sicurezza, soprattutto in merito all'elevato rischio della Strada

Regionale via Cassia, per la quale sono stati richiesti e progettati attraversamenti pedonali sicuri, anche con l'installazione di semafori a chiamata ed interventi di moderazione del traffico.

Gli elaborati e le sintesi dei risultati emersi dai laboratori nelle scuole sono divenuti parte del masterplan co-costruito nei laboratori di progettazione partecipata con gli adulti (Fig.5) e delle progettualità comprese nel documento strategico e nel piano di azione del CdF Ombrone. Dal percorso di costruzione del CdF scaturiscono 6 obiettivi generali e 22 obiettivi specifici, che trovano attuazione in 33 idee e progetti sia alla scala di Bacino che alla scala locale<sup>7</sup>.

Nel Piano di Azione (PA), costituito dall'insieme delle schede descrittive delle idee e progetti condivisi che delineano un quadro complessivo trasversale capace di coinvolgere molteplici enti e realtà territoriali alle varie scale (regionali, provinciali, comunali ecc.), sono inserite un ventaglio di azioni indirizzate alla conoscenza e alla valorizzazione del contesto fluviale ed orientate, in particolare, alle giovani generazioni.

*Fase 2: progetto: "OSIAMO! Le giovani generazioni verso il contratto di fiume Ombrone. Conoscenza e valorizzazione del patrimonio fluviale dell'Ombrone e dell'Arbia"*

Dai laboratori nella fascia d'età 6-13 sono state prodotte in totale 6 mappe delle emozioni, 4 mappe di Gulliver, focus progettuali puntuali ed interviste.

In occasione del gemellaggio tra le scuole duran-

te la passeggiata a Buonconvento sono presenti anche le architetture incaricate dal Comune per il progetto del parco fluviale; le bambine e i bambini hanno così modo di esporre sul campo il loro progetto ai tecnici, attraverso la mappa delle progettualità realizzata per la sintesi dei risultati emerse dalle scuole in occasione del precedente progetto.

Le attività svolte hanno aggiunto una specifica visione dei luoghi alla molteplicità di interessi e di punti di vista. Le bambine e i bambini hanno infatti uno sguardo "naturale", meno viziato dai pregiudizi, orientato al benessere ambientale ed aperto alla sperimentazione e all'innovazione (Paba, Pecoriello, 2006).

Per la fascia d'età 14 -18 è stata strutturata un'attività specifica di analisi del territorio e del paesaggio attraverso l'utilizzo di cartografie, con un *focus* sulla individuazione della rete dei sentieri per il rilancio di nuove economie basate sulla fruizione lenta.

La classe coinvolta ha elaborato delle cartografie di analisi del territorio e di *vision* sul tema della connessione lenta proponendo percorsi pedociclabili tematici e alcune soluzioni per la realizzazione di *hub* intermodali.

La fascia di età che comprende le studentesse e gli studenti universitari ha partecipato, invece, alla progettazione della Porta dell'Ombrone, intesa sia come spazio fisico di accesso e fruizione del fiume, sia come portale virtuale informativo e dinamico per l'intero bacino. L'attività è stata organizzata con *workshop* e *summer school*, se-

condo l'approccio *dell'action learning* (Reardon, 1998; Saija, 2016), in cui integrare diversi campi disciplinari afferenti al DIDA dell'Università di Firenze e al Dipartimento di Geografia e Scienze della Comunicazione dell'Università di Siena. Sono stati realizzati progetti grafici e modelli architettonici della porta del parco, con *focus* sull'area del Comune di Buonconvento.

L'Amministrazione comunale ha promosso, inoltre, un *contest* ed uno di questi progetti è stato votato e selezionato dall'Amministrazione stessa come installazione della porta del parco; la porta del parco progettata da un gruppo di studentesse del DIDA di Firenze sarà a breve installata all'interno del parco fluviale.

*Fase 3: "Buonconvento futura è oggi. Il Consiglio dei Ragazzi per un futuro condiviso"*

I laboratori sono stati facilitati da una società che opera nella facilitazione e nella comunicazione. Nella prima fase dei lavori è stato organizzato un seminario per i docenti inerente al CCR e somministrato un questionario a cui hanno risposto 151 ragazzi tra i 9 ed i 14 anni sui temi della partecipazione e della democrazia.

Sono stati organizzati quattro *workshop* coinvolgendo oltre 60 ragazzi sfidandosi con il gioco in scatola "Democracy", ideato dal gruppo di lavoro Cantieri Animati<sup>8</sup> che cura il processo partecipativo, sfidandosi a conoscere le diverse forme elettive e le possibili modalità di coinvolgimento dei non eletti.

I ragazzi sono stati invitati a riflettere sul concetto di democrazia inclusiva, mediante meto-

dologie facilitate basate sul gioco e sulla simulazione, ed hanno definito in modo partecipato 'le regole del gioco' per un modello di CCR.

### **Discussione**

L'esperienza di ricerca-azione proposta nel contributo consente di tracciare il percorso di *empowerment* che le giovani generazioni hanno intrapreso in cinque anni di animazione territoriale e di evidenziare il rinnovato senso di appartenenza alla comunità rivierasca da questo generato.

Il percorso promosso dal basso si avvia con il coinvolgimento delle scuole dei due comuni pilota ed evolve in un processo corale di *engagement* dell'intera comunità scolastica rivierasca (Tabella 2). I progetti nelle scuole innescano, inoltre, un processo di presa di coscienza e di reidentificazione collettiva del fiume che generano rinnovate consapevolezza e che indirizzano le giovani e i giovani partecipanti verso la formazione di una comunità di cura.

Per meglio comprendere gli esiti del percorso in termini di consapevolezza ed il processo di *empowerment* delle bambine e dei bambini è utile far riferimento, ad esempio, ad una bambina o ad un bambino nel 2017-2018 abita a Buonconvento, frequenta la terza A della scuola primaria e partecipa al laboratorio "OSIAMO. Verso il Contratto di fiume Ombrone" con le sue compagne ed i suoi compagni di classe. Conosce alcuni attivisti del comitato e, con il supporto dei facilitatori del gruppo dell'Università, progetta il parco

fluviale che si snoda lungo l'argine del fiume fino al parco attrezzato all'ingresso del centro urbano. Con la sua classe scrive anche una lettera indirizzata agli adulti dove chiedono di essere ascoltati e di aver cura del fiume e del parco che hanno progettato con impegno e dedizione.

Nel 2020 la stessa bambina/o frequenta la quinta A della scuola primaria e partecipa ai laboratori del progetto "OSIAMO ancora: le scuole si incontrano". Incontra i suoi compagni del Comune di Cinigiano che, come lei, due anni prima hanno partecipato ai laboratori. Partecipa alle uscite sul fiume nei Comuni di Cinigiano e Buonconvento e scopre che il fiume, nonostante sia lo stesso, ha una morfologia diversa e che, nella vicina provincia di Grosseto, il fiume Ombrone è molto diverso: ha un letto molto più ampio, è distante dal centro abitato e non è percepito come un fattore di rischio.

Le passeggiate sul fiume sono anche un'ottima occasione per fare nuove amicizie e comprende che sono tutti parte dello stesso fiume: una sola comunità fluviale.

La sua percezione cambia, il suo punto di vista si estende e si sente appartenere ad un unico fiume come le sue nuove amiche e amici dell'altra provincia.

In occasione della passeggiata a Buonconvento ha anche modo di esporre le proprie idee all'Amministrazione Comunale e alle architetture paesaggiste che si occupano del progetto del parco fluviale, confrontandosi con loro su alcune tematiche inerenti alle progettualità. Nota anche

che gli attivisti del comitato che aveva conosciuto qualche anno prima, adesso sono lì in veste di Sindaco ed Assessora.

Assieme alle compagne ed i compagni consegna all'Amministrazione Comunale la lettera scritta due anni prima, chiedendo anche di poter prendere parte alle scelte decisionali del Comune. Quel giorno torna a casa con la promessa di un invito in una seduta del Consiglio Comunale.

Nel 2021 la stessa bambina/o frequenta la scuola secondaria di primo grado e partecipa al progetto "Buonconvento futura è oggi. Il consiglio dei ragazzi per un futuro condiviso". Segue i laboratori e si candida per il Consiglio Comunale dei ragazzi perché vorrebbe seguire il loro progetto, poter incidere sulle scelte future ed avanzare delle nuove proposte e prendersi cura del fiume e del suo territorio.

L'esempio utilizzato per descrivere il processo di *empowerment* delle e dei giovani di Buonconvento, dimostra come i progetti attivati con le scuole e in collaborazione con la comunità, se generativi, possono avere un ruolo cardine nella formazione di una società consapevole e collaborativa.

Il percorso nelle scuole non concerne esclusivamente bambine e bambini: il loro ruolo di catalizzatori fa sì che il percorso, articolato nel medio periodo, abbia un impatto concreto anche sugli adulti che hanno prodotto assieme a loro una visione comune del Fiume ed il *masterplan* condiviso. L'impatto è anche sugli amministratori e sui tecnici comunali che, da una parte, si sono

misurati con le idee delle bambine e dei bambini e, dall'altra, hanno avviato un processo di amministrazione condivisa con l'istituzione del CCR. Tuttavia, le progettualità espresse dai laboratori nelle scuole trovano ad oggi una irrilevante attuazione in quanto si scontrano nell'incapacità di tradursi in concreta progettualità e mancanza di risorse da parte dell'amministrazione comunale. Ad oggi sono stati realizzati, infatti, soltanto gli interventi di moderazione del traffico indicati dal percorso nelle scuole ed una parte del parcheggio funzionale al parco fluviale; per quanto riguarda gli impianti sportivi la piscina comunale è invece in fase di apertura.

L'impegno di cura delle nuove generazioni ha determinato una risposta proattiva delle istituzioni attraverso la riapertura di canali di apprendimento reciproco tra i diversi attori coinvolti, ha indirizzato scelte progettuali condivise, ed ha innescato nuovi progetti generativi all'interno di una visione comune di territorio. Tra questi il progetto per la riapertura della piscina comunale, come struttura di interesse sovralocale, e la futura progettazione del nuovo parco giochi all'interno del parco fluviale.

Partendo da questo assunto il contributo vuole mettere in evidenza il ruolo delle bambine e dei bambini nella società: la loro visione ed esperienza di vita può contribuire allo co-costruzione di politiche pubbliche e il loro *empowerment* può generare comunità della cura, inclusive e collaborative. È in questo senso che il contributo propone di interpretare le bambine e i bambini co-

me soggetti trasformativi e promotori della cura del bene comune come azione sociale.

### Conclusioni

Il contributo ripercorre la traiettoria concettuale che dalla "Città dei bambini" (Tonucci, 1996) alla "Città bambina" (Paba, Pecoriello, 2006), interpreta le bambine e i bambini come soggetti attivi e protagonisti dei processi partecipativi per disegnare una città più inclusiva.

Questa chiave di lettura ha permesso di aprire ad una nuova modalità di coinvolgimento e di progettazione degli spazi urbani, intesi dalla società come futuri cittadini, le bambine e i bambini hanno una diversa responsabilità democratica rispetto agli adulti; non sono possessori di una cittadinanza effettiva ma, come definita da Giancarlo Paba, la loro cittadinanza è 'differita': arriverà in un secondo momento, per dare loco voce è necessario ascoltarla attraverso la partecipazione (Paba, Pecoriello, 2006).

L'intento di questo contributo è dunque quello di valorizzare il ruolo delle bambine e dei bambini al centro delle scelte decisionali come cittadine e cittadini trasformativi all'interno di un processo cooperativo e legato al concetto di cura.

Con la descrizione del processo di *empowerment* delle giovani generazioni del Comune di Buonconvento, il contributo tenta di mettere in luce alcuni aspetti dell'esperienza di ricerca-azione: i) la capacità di coinvolgere le fasce di età prescolare nella costruzione di *vision*; ii) il percorso delle bambine e dei bambini coinvolti che han-



no innescato progettualità generative per la costruzione di una comunità fluviale consapevole, che valorizza e si prende cura del territorio.

Le tecniche di rappresentazione sperimentate dal gruppo di ricerca nei laboratori con le scuole hanno permesso inoltre di sviluppare visioni che hanno ampliato l'immaginario collettivo dei giovani partecipanti e alimentato una presa di coscienza che riguarda plurimi aspetti: da un lato, il fiume non è più riconosciuto come limite territoriale ma come elemento di connessione e di fruizione, dall'altro, il fiume non è più percepito come fattore di rischio ma come bene comune da valorizzare.

Seppure l'affermazione dell'attuale modello sociale abbia allontanato le bambine e i bambini dal fiume e dalla vita degli spazi pubblici, l'immagine fluviale e la sua connotazione infrastrutturale sono insite in ogni giovane partecipante, rafforzata anche grazie al percorso nelle scuole. Se la navigabilità è ritenuta utopia per gran parte degli adulti e pertanto neppure vagliata, per le bambine e i bambini, invece, sembra naturale considerare questa vocazione. Questo emerge in particolar modo dai lavori dei più piccoli; nei laboratori di animazione degli asili nido, infatti, il fiume è già percepito come un'infrastruttura blu e rappresentato con una piccola zattera.

Nel percorso di riconoscimento della comunità rivierasca e di costruzione del CdF le bambine e i bambini rivestono un ruolo cardine: elaborano progetti del parco fluviale e *vision* integrate che

diventano parte del masterplan condiviso (Fig. 5).

È in questo senso che i giovani diventano parte di un processo di apprendimento collettivo e di costruzione di una visione di cura condivisa determinando una nuova relazione coevolutiva tra giovani, adulti, istituzioni e territorio.

Seguendo questo indirizzo il contributo ci spinge a considerare l'obiettivo cui tendere: quello di promuovere forme di pianificazione cooperativa con un ruolo sociale, aperte al coinvolgimento intergenerazionale, che interpreta le bambine e i bambini come soggetto attivo della cura dei luoghi.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Articolato in tre scenari: “rischio e infrastrutture”; “qualità ambientale ed ecosistemica”; fruibilità e sviluppo locale.

<sup>2</sup> Sono coinvolte le scuole dei due Comuni Pilota: Buonconvento e Cinigiano. In totale partecipano ai laboratori circa 250 bambine e bambini dai 3 ai 15 anni, in via sperimentale sono coinvolte due classi dell'asilo nido dei due Comuni.

<sup>3</sup> Sono coinvolte le scuole dei comuni della provincia di Siena: Castelnuovo Bernardenga con la sua frazione Pianella, Monteroni d'Arbia e Buonconvento e della Provincia di Grosseto Paganico e Cinigiano. In totale 11 classi e circa 200 bambine e bambini e ragazzi. Nella fascia di età superiore ai 15 anni sono state coinvolte una classe dell'Istituto Tecnico Economico e Tecnologico di Siena ed alcuni studenti dell'Università di Firenze e di Siena.

<sup>4</sup> Sotto-azione 1.3 “OSIAMO ancora: le scuole si incontrano” è un'attività concepita in prosecuzione del percorso attivato nel 2017 con le classi della primaria e della secondaria di primo grado di Buonconvento e Cinigiano. Tale attività è stata strutturata con momenti di incontri e di scambio di esperienze tra le classi precedentemente coinvolte. Le attività sono state finalizzate a delineare modalità differenti di conoscenza e fruizione del fiume al fine di creare un senso di appartenenza a tutta l'asta fluviale e non solo limitata al tratto locale. Le bambine e i bambini hanno fatto conoscere il proprio contesto fluviale alla scuola “gemellata”, e hanno scoperto il fiume e il suo territorio nel tratto dell'altra provincia. Ognuno di loro ha dunque compreso di esser parte di un'unica grande comunità rivierasca.

<sup>5</sup> La mappa di Gulliver è una mappa collettiva realizzata su una base libera e fuori scala ad una grandezza sovradimensionata rispetto ai partecipanti. In questo modo le bambine ed i bambini possono immergersi nella realizzazione della mappa.

<sup>6</sup> L'utilizzo della tecnica del collage è frutto di una ricerca stilistica di rappresentazione grafica e concettuale che va nella direzione di inclusività dei laboratori.

<sup>7</sup> Per maggiore approfondimento si veda il Piano d'Azione pubblicato sul sito internet dedicato: <https://open.toscana.it/web/osiamo-verso-un-contratto-di-fiume-per-ombrone>.

<sup>8</sup> Per approfondimenti si veda il sito internet della Regione Toscana <https://partecipatoscana.it/web/buonconvento-futura-oggi/-/i-consigli-comunali-dei-ragazzi-e-delle-ragazze> - ultimo accesso aprile 2022

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# From *Terrain Vague* to Vague Farm: Cultivating Urban Vacant Land through Practices of Commoning

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urban commons  
urban agriculture

## Introduction

In contemporary cities, there is a noticeable presence of ambiguous and undefined open spaces, lacking specific functions and economic productivity, which appear abandoned and uncontrolled, awaiting future developments. These spaces, defined for example as *Terrain Vague*, *Vacant Land* or *Urban Voids*, can be understood as the results or waste of increasingly invasive and rapid urbanisation processes, extending to new scales of influence. A com-

plexity captured by the theory of *Planetary urbanization* (Brenner & Schmid, 2011) for example, which not only challenges the traditional dichotomy between urban and non-urban—nowadays obsolete—but also conceives of urbanised territory at a larger scale, as part of regional landscapes and ecologies. These are shaped by spatial arrangements that influence ecological and ecosystemic structures, biodiversity (Clément, 2022), as well as the planning, functions, and flows of hu-

*Different strands of scientific literature use various terminologies to refer to types of urban spaces without productive function, abandoned and legally uncontrolled. These include at least the following three: “Terrain Vague”, “vacant lot”, and “urban voids”. Although different, they all similarly evoke spaces where emptiness prevails over fullness and is in a perpetual state of suspension. These spaces, because of their characteristics and their temporary complete availability, are used daily by different communities, spontaneously and informally, through different*

appropriations and uses, and by nature, where species not allowed elsewhere and in the absence of human control find refuge, unusual encounters can occur. Over the last twenty years, a series of projects, activities and practices have begun to emerge in these spaces, such as especially recent park and garden projects in Europe, that retain or incorporate spontaneous vegetation, undefined functions, and a wild aesthetic, reflecting a growing interest in and new appreciation of these spaces, particularly among landscape architects. Among these types of projects and initiatives, those that we will define here as *Vague Farm*, undoubtedly stand out. By this term, we refer to projects and initiatives that, while mainly based on the creation and management of urban garden and activities related to agriculture and local food production, also aim to preserve some of the informal and spontaneous characteristics of the previous *Terrain Vague*. This paper proposes a first attempt at defining *Vague Farms*, through the analysis of five case studies intentionally chosen from different European cities, to show the simultaneous emergence of these practices. To achieve this, it proposes:

- i) a brief theoretical introduction to *Terrain Vague* and its relationship

- with agriculture and communing (theoretical background);
- ii) a reading of these community urban gardens projects through the lenses of *Urban Commons* (observed experiences and results);
- iii) a proposal of a definition of *vague farms* projects and their characteristics (discussion).

man life (Forman, 1995). *Terrain Vague* spaces, although often conceived as waste, hold significant intrinsic value for the local community and can reactivate regeneration processes and *commoning* from participation and bottom-up perspective: “Spaces discarded by productive logic but valuable for local communities” (Perrone and Russo 2019, p. 13).

In fact, because of their characteristics and their temporary availability, these spaces are used daily by different communities, spontaneously and informally, through different appropriations and uses, and by nature, where species not allowed elsewhere and in the absence of human control could find refuge, and unusual encounters can occur. Among the many activities carried out daily and spontaneously in *Terrain Vague* spaces, one of the most frequent is undoubtedly agriculture, for two reasons: on the one hand because it is often linked to the origin, history and traditions of these spaces; on the other hand, since it does not necessitate buildings or fixed structures, but rather offers a pleasant op-

portunity for socializing outdoors, urban farming provides the potential to grow food and vegetables. In essence, it can serve as a relatively straightforward and cost-effective means of harnessing the potential of such spaces. One of the most complex challenges concerning *Terrain Vague* spaces lies in how to intervene with projects, plans, or formal activities while preserving something of the nature or characteristics of *Terrain Vague*, as Solà-Morales already observed in the first definition of these spaces:

“How can architecture act in *Terrain Vague* without becoming an aggressive instrument of power and abstract reason? Undoubtedly, through attention to continuity: not the continuity of the planned, efficient, and legitimated city, but of the flows, the energies, the rhythms established by the passing of time and the loss of limits” (1995, p. 123).

The ambiguity lies in designing a formal intervention without debasing, distorting or completely erasing the values and potential of *Terrain Vague* spaces. How can one plan, delimit, and shape something that by its nature is vague, indeterminate, and continually changing?

Over the last twenty years, a series of projects, activities and practices have begun to emerge in these spaces which, although often originating from more informal contexts, have begun processes of formalization and relations with institutions and local authorities (Gandy, 2013a; Hou, 2010; Kamvasinou, 2006, 2020; Mariani & Barron, 2014; Zetti & Rossi, 2018). This has led to

the formation of associations and to the implementation of formal designed projects, sometimes also with the aim of securing funds and guarantees for the management of the space. It is important to emphasize that any *Terrain Vague*, upon undergoing a designed, formal, and institutional intervention aimed at altering its original state, theoretically and practically ceases to exist as a *Terrain Vague*. This is because such interventions inherently change the space’s status, eliminating its abandonment, lack of function, and suspended state. However, the novelty of these projects lies precisely in their ability to transition from a state of informality and spontaneity to one of formalization and structure, while still preserving some of the essence of the original *Terrain Vague* spaces. Consequently, we sought projects and practices in these spaces that, while transforming and discontinuing their previous *Terrain Vague* status, also preserve, maintain, or draw inspiration from some of the principles and essence of *Terrain Vague* as defined previously. Amongst these types of practices, we focused on five projects and practices (observed experiences) that were primarily based on agriculture or farming, and thus spatially focused on the implementation, management and maintenance of an urban community garden or farm.

The presence and combination of these characteristics in the observed experiences has led to a proposal for a definition of *Vague Farm*. By this term, we refer to the type of projects and

initiatives that: while mainly based on the creation and management of an urban garden and activities related to agriculture and local food production, at the same time have an approach that aims to preserve some of the informal and spontaneous characteristics of the previous *Terrain Vague*. In the approach of the projects and practices observed, *Terrain Vague* spaces are not conceived merely as empty lots to be filled or cleared, but as sites where existing features and potentials are respected and integrated into new designs, management and functioning. Hence, a pivotal question arises: Can formal projects and practices in these spaces, supported institutionally, effectively achieve their goals while preserving or enhancing the distinct characteristics of *Terrain Vague*?

While public support through funding or land concessions is not a necessary element for the establishment of *Vague Farms*, it can certainly facilitate the realization of these practices and projects. In all the observed cases, public institutions or local authorities played a crucial role in the development and formalization of these practices, albeit with a different approach from the traditional one: instead of imposing top-down strategies and projects, they encouraged and supported the emergence of grassroots initiatives and locally proposed projects. However, public support and the formalization process also come with inherent risks. Public funding or support can be withdrawn for various reasons, or new plans may be developed for *Terrain*

*Vague* spaces to increase their economic productivity or market value.

The concept of *Vague Farms*, that emerges from the intersection of observations of certain emerging practices and the theoretical lenses employed. The definition stems from two sources: first, the observation of five emerging practices selected from five European cities, narrowing the focus at this stage to a limited context; and second, the interpretation and reinterpretation of these practices considering theoretical literature on *Terrain Vague* spaces and *commoning* practices. To outline and deduce this new concept from the experiences, the paper offers: i) a brief theoretical introduction to *Terrain Vague* and its relationship with agriculture, aiming to define the characteristics of these spaces; ii) an examination of five emerging practices through the selected theoretical lenses of Urban Commons; and iii) a proposal for a definition of *Vague Farms* projects and their characteristics, derived from the observation of the implementation and management methods of the practices studied.

A comprehensive analysis of these emerging practices within *Terrain Vague* spaces, alongside their reinterpretation through the lens of *commoning* theory, can enhance our understanding and systematization of these projects. This approach also helps in grasping the transition from *Terrain Vague* spaces to newly cultivated, community-managed areas, culminating in the formulation of a new concept: *Vague Farms*.

## Methodology

Methodologically, the research consists of a selection, description, and qualitative comparison of five observed experiences of community urban gardens projects implemented in Europe in previously abandoned *Terrain Vague* spaces. This decision was driven by practical reasons, including familiarity with the context and proximity to the projects. The authors also conducted brief exploratory visits to all the projects, except for R-Urban, to observe the novelty of these emerging practices, termed *Vague Farms*, even though they did not engage deeply with participants or conduct interviews.

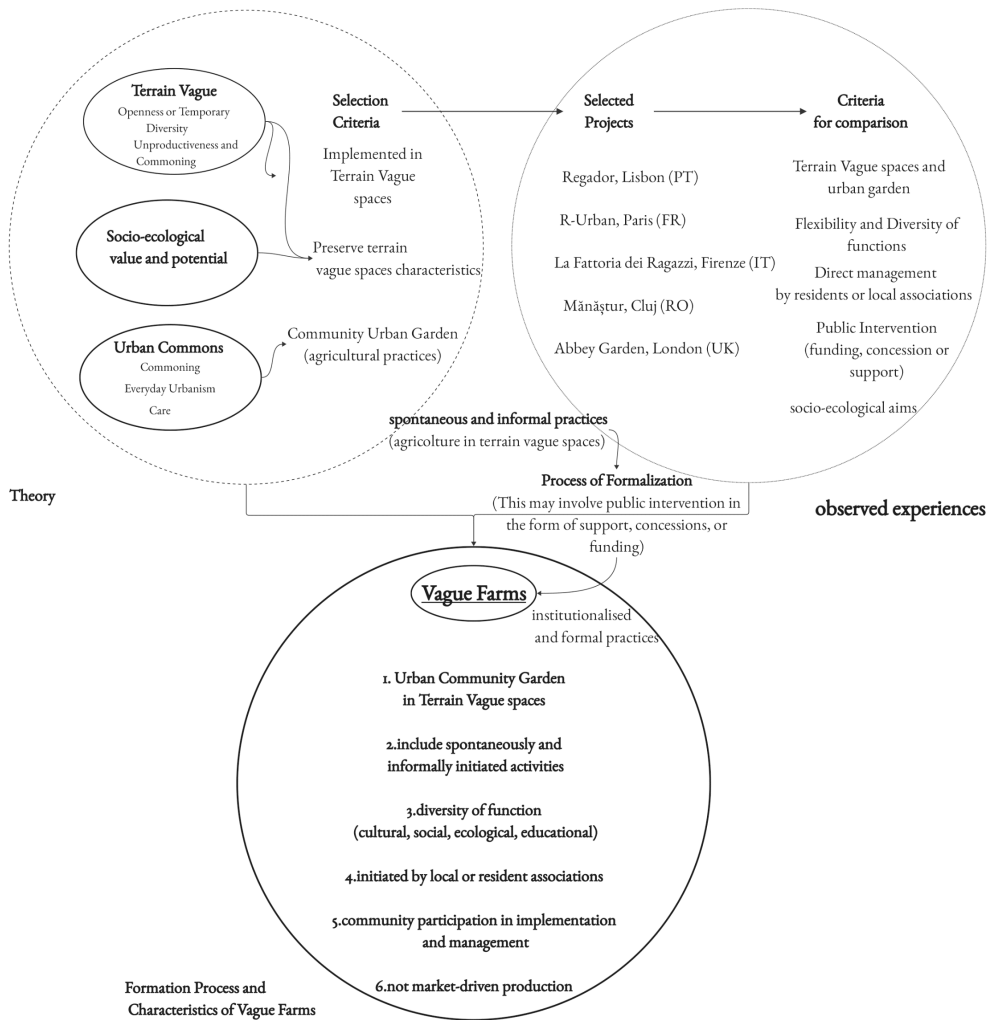
The objective is to reach a first attempt at a definition of *Vague Farms*, i.e. emerging formal community urban garden projects, implemented and formalized with the support of public institutions but always initiated and proposed by residents and grassroots associations, with the participation of architects and specialist, whose approach aims to preserve some of the characteristics, informal activities and values that existed before the intervention, enhancing the set of informal knowledge and practices of the community.

These observed experiences, which are entirely designed and managed by the community, were chosen based on three criteria: i) they are relatively recent urban community garden projects in European cities; ii) they are located in spaces that were previously *Terrain Vague*; iii) they aim to preserve some of the fundamental char-

acteristics of these former *Terrain Vague* spaces (such as community and spontaneous uses, direct management by users diversity, flexibility, and non-profit purposes).

In the central section of the article, a brief description and a concise comparison of the five observed experiences are provided. This comparison is based on both the three project selection criteria and the comparison criteria chosen to explore differences and similarities in practice: i) physical space condition and duration; ii) initiatives, project, and management by residents and users; iii) support and role of the public. Subsequently, the results are presented, focusing on the criteria described in the different projects. These results are discussed and analysed through the lens of urban commons theory to better understand the conception, creation, and management of the described experiences. However, the information gathered for writing this article was obtained through the study of articles, web pages, and document analysis; the visits provided a quick overview of the projects. In fact, the choice of projects is intended to be purely illustrative and aimed at a preliminary formulation of a definition. For these reasons, the definition remains open to future new examples and projects that may identify with these practices. Furthermore, an important future development of the research could be to verify and test the validity of the definition in contexts outside of Europe, worldwide. An extensive discussion on the validity or





**Diagram illustrating the methodology and the logic used in the research for proposing a definition of Vague Farms. The diagram demonstrates how the criteria for selecting experiences were derived from theory, and how these experiences, observed according to the comparison criteria, contribute to the first attempt at proposing a definition of Vague Farms and their characteristics**

Source: Image of the authors

Fig.1

differences in definitions and these spaces in specific contexts is undoubtedly necessary but would require a separate study.

### **Theoretical Background**

The uncertain and vague nature of *Terrain Vague* spaces and the difficulty of framing them in any category of urban space is reported and many authors have proposed different definitions and terms to describe and define these spaces. For example, *Terrain Vague* (Lévesque, 2001; Mariani & Barron, 2014; Solà-Morales, 1995), *Vacant land* (Bowman & Pagano, 2004), *Urban Voids* (Lopez-Pineiro, 2020), *Wastelands* (Gandy, 2013), *Brownfield* (Berger, 2006; Gandy, 2022), *Third Landscape* (Clément, 2022). These various definitions refer to the same type of spaces, and therefore do not differ in their physical description; rather, they represent the perspectives of different disciplines, or the visions, viewpoints, nuances, or interpretations of different authors. In fact, these spaces are the subject of interest and cross-fertilization of research from different branches of knowledge and disciplines, each with its own point of view: architecture, urbanism, economics, geography, sociology, art, environmental science, and many others. For example, the most widely used definitions of *Urban Voids* and *Vacant Land*, considered the most neutral and generic, also reveal an interpretation of these spaces: *Urban Voids*, by judging the absence of buildings or constructed space as emptiness, reflects a perspective primarily tied

to architecture and urban design; *Vacant Land*, the term most commonly used across various disciplines, represents a productive and functional view of the city, linked to planning, building laws and regulations, and urban economics, focusing on the absence of productive functions and their causes while overlooking, for instance, informal uses or ecological value. Instead, the concept of the *Third Landscape* (Clément, 2022) has focused attention on the value of these spaces and their importance for the ecosystem and for evolution. Above all, from the point of view of biodiversity and the presence of rare species, which has led to an increasing reevaluation of these spaces from an environmental and ecological point of view. This was reflected in the change of terminology from terms with a negative connotation, such as *Brownfields* and *Wastelands*, which describe these spaces by highlighting their origin, such as leftover spaces resulting from large-scale urbanization processes, or their previous activities and their status as derelict land, often as a consequence of industrial functions, to other terms that tend to emphasize their value, as well as a growing literature on the ecological value of these spaces (Gandy, 2013; 2022; McPhearson et al., 2013). We could define these spaces as open and abandoned spaces, in a state of neglect or vacancy, out of the control and productive circuits of the city, yet spontaneously used and appropriated daily by different communities for various informal and spontaneous activities, and by

nature, which grows spontaneously and out of human control, offering refuge for species not permitted elsewhere and for unprecedented encounters and mixes. These spaces offer an unprecedented and rare intersection of social and ecological interests (Lopez-Pineiro, 2020).

Among these definitions, the authors prioritize the definition of *Terrain Vague* (Solà-Morales, 1995), because it is the first definition to conceive the void in a positive way, as a possibility and potential, charging these spaces with a great cultural, artistic and creative value, as well as for the fact that it has highlighted certain points that we consider essential and relevant in the definition of these spaces and for the contemporary debate. One of the main characteristics of the *Terrain Vague* is diversity: diversity of functions and diversity of actors and species. Indeed, due to the absence of human control, these spaces are extremely rich in biodiversity (Brito-Henriques et al., 2019; Gandy, 2022; Soares et al., 2017; Clément, 2022).

Moreover, these spaces lie in a particular continuous condition of suspension, which may be temporary or last several years; for this reason, these spaces are flexible and open to accommodate any kind of possibility, function, event and are temporarily unproductive from a profit or market perspective. Finally, it is important to emphasize the difficulty of the Urban Planning and Architecture design project to intervene in these particular spaces without debasing, erasing or diminishing their value or potential:

“they seem incapable of doing anything other than introducing violent transformations, changing estrangement into citizenship, and striving at all costs to dissolve the uncontaminated magic of the obsolete in the realism of efficacy” (Solà-Morales, 1995, p.122).

*Terrain Vague* spaces are linked to agriculture and the rural dimension, for at least two reasons: their origin and their current informal use. Firstly, in fact, the origin of these spaces is linked to the phenomenon of the rapid, uncontrolled, and invasive urbanization of the last century, which exploded and projected the limits of the city outwards, thus ending up completely redefining the boundaries of the city and the difference between urban and rural areas. This aspect, together with the lack or ineffectiveness of plans and visions on a regional scale, has contributed to the creation of residual, fragmented, and functionless areas. Another term used to define these spaces, which is the term used in Germany, is *Brachen* (Gandy, 2011, 2013, 2022); although it is used to define vacant lots, its meaning is of fallow land, i.e. land left fallow to rest and regenerate, and thus recalls an agricultural tradition or past. Additionally, due to urban sprawl that has rapidly reached and invaded rural areas previously outside city boundaries, the origin of these spaces is sometimes related to the *Common Lands* in the United Kingdom or the *Baldios* in Portugal, highlighting their collective and common use history (Travasso, 2022). Additionally, it can be stated that farming, cultivation, and agricultural activities constitute in-

formal practices that are widespread in these abandoned spaces (Iannizzotto, 2023). Several factors contribute to this phenomenon: the scarcity of fertile land in urban areas, the advantageous positioning of certain areas in relation to water sources, and the relatively straightforward and cost-effective nature of food production. It is noteworthy that gardening or agriculture often emerge as the initial or most prevalent activities in these spaces (Afonso & Melo, 2023), reflecting the historical abandonment of agricultural practices (Brito-Henriques & Morgado, 2017).

If these two aspects highlight and reinforce the relationship between *Terrain Vague* spaces and agriculture, it is interesting to note that most of the activities in these spaces, including agricultural practices, whether formal or informal, are often characterized by community management, a strong component of self-organization, and are initiated through spontaneous appropriations and local resident participation.

Due to their characteristics and conditions, *Terrain Vague*, *Vacant Lands* and *Wastelands* are privileged spaces for community activities and *commoning* practices, as well as for the realization of regeneration projects that adopt and include these approaches and participation practices (Belingardi, 2015; Petrescu & Petcou, 2023; Stavrides, 2014; 2016), revealing their nature of suitable spaces for emerging and dissenting possibilities, alternative to speculation. This occurs for at least two reasons: the

first concerns the immediacy and greater availability of these lands, where, due to their state of abandonment, disuse, and condition of unproductiveness (whether temporary or permanent), use prevails over ownership (Belingardi, 2015; Petrescu & Petcou, 2023); the second concerns the possibilities these spaces offer, in fact these spaces can always be conceived as potential *urban commons* (Belingardi, 2015), or potential threshold spaces, meaning spaces of connection and relationship “to be appropriated through practices of commoning” (Stavrides, 2014, p.50) becoming reinvented as common spaces and sites of social interaction, and potential. In fact, *Vague Farms* projects, include in a formal project practices and activities that often already exist in that place, or in other places but are already practiced by the community, according to the principles of the concept of *Everyday Urbanism* (Certeau, 2011; Chase et al., 1999), enhancing the community’s ensemble and sharing of techniques and knowledge. In this sense, these kinds of projects, initiatives and practices can be considered *Urban Commons* (Borch & Kornberger, 2015; Dellenbaugh-Losse et al., 2018; Foster & Iaione, 2022; Urban Commons Research Collective, 2022) and *Commoning* (Stavrides, 2014, 2016). Indeed, collective urban gardens are often used as examples of urban commons, as in the case of the *Düsseldorfgrün* (Dellenbaugh-Losse et al., 2018) or others.

Although the topic is controversial and widely debated, with significant resistance to for-

malizing *commoning* practices due to potential risks, as well as reluctance from institutions to recognize and support these initiatives, it is important to note that in certain cases, especially within *Terrain Vague* spaces, institutions can provide support to encourage or formalize these practices without changing the direct management by residents. This can happen because the temporary absence or infeasibility of projects (due to a lack of investors, economic crises, or legal issues), combined with the perception of decay or danger in spaces that are neglected or unmanaged, pushes local authorities to encourage maintenance, use, and management by entrusting (at least temporarily) the management to residents or local non-profit associations at very low costs. This support can be provided in various ways, such as granting permission for the use of abandoned public lands or lots, providing support through resource transfer, infrastructure, and policies that enable residents and local communities to have direct access and management of resources.

A crucial aspect of urban commons practices, which often spontaneously emerges also in activities within *Terrain Vague* spaces, is care, the everyday care of relationships and of the space. The temporary looseness of private property constraints, along with the absence of specific functions, control, and rules, fosters relationships among residents and various communities, encouraging self-organization for the management of the vacant space.

In fact, *Urban Commons* rely on daily activities of care, practices and spontaneous care that often already exist in everyday life. This includes a wide range of material and immaterial actions, primarily based on social relationships, which may include, for example, cleaning, management, maintenance, social relationships among commoners, as well as relationships with the external community (Belingardi, 2015; Gabauer et al., 2021), that leads to a form of management that does not aim for profit but rather the good management of resources, the strengthening of relations, and the improvement of the quality of life and urban spaces. We have discussed how, due to their characteristics and status, *Terrain Vague* spaces can be privileged areas for the implementation of commoning practices. It is useful to recall that among these activities, community gardens are one of the most common and evident examples of urban commons in the literature: “Many urban community gardens in the world are functioning—sometimes only temporarily—as urban commons: they are collectively managed assets, using land and tools in common beyond property rules, and offering space for (re)production and socialization to city dwellers who act as commoners” (Urban Commons Research Collective 2022, p.59). Moreover, although there is not an extensive specific literature on community urban gardens in *Terrain Vague* spaces, there is a rich literature and tradition on community urban agriculture. It is plausible to think that the first spac-

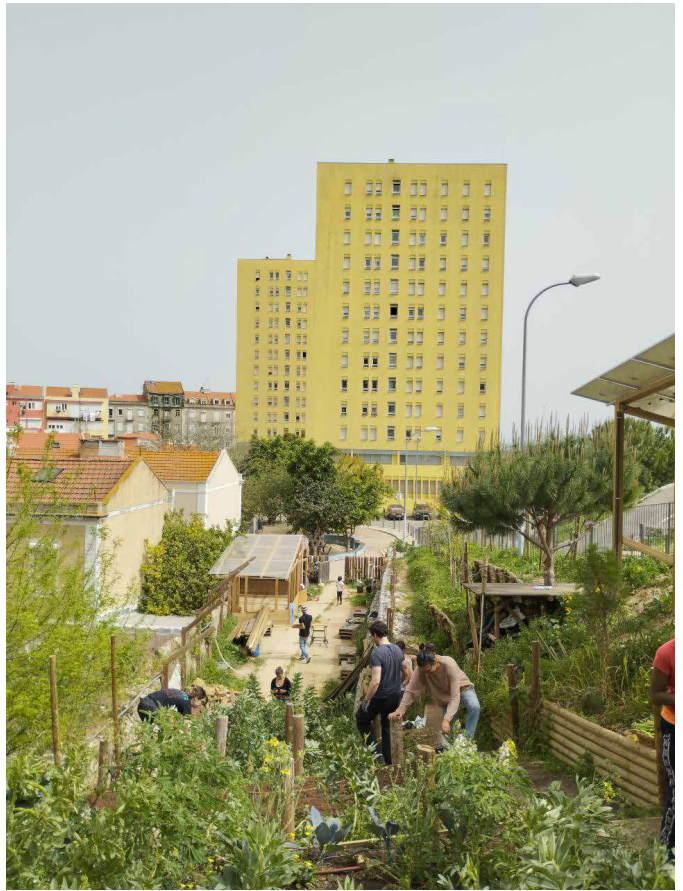
es to be occupied and cultivated were indeed urban voids. Particularly in times of crisis, from the medieval period to World War II, community urban agriculture was a widespread activity in European cities. It primarily took place in vacant spaces designated for this purpose or in abandoned, unused areas incentivized by urban policies in derelict areas of cities (Belingardi, 2015). The rediscovery of this activity and the emergence of contemporary community gardens, now widespread and common in many cities, from municipal urban gardens assigned to individual residents (Parques Hortícolas in Lisbon, Orti Comunalì in Bologna), to community gardens managed by associations or residents (Mudchute Park and Farm in London), and even gardens managed by communities and social centers (Vall de Can Masdeu, Barcelona), likely began in New York at the end of the 1970s. This followed the occupation of vacant, uncultivated lots or lots filled with rubble because of the economic crisis (Belingardi, 2015).

## Observed Experiences

### Regador, Lisbon (PT)

The *Regador* association in Lisbon, assembled during the period of restrictions due to the pandemic, was formed by a group of residents with the desire to recover a slower and more communitarian lifestyle, and with the objective of recovering, learning, sharing, and experimenting with agricultural techniques in the city. After creating and experimenting with two dif-

ferent urban gardens, a vertical garden on the walls of a building and a garden in the space of a library, the association obtained public funding, through the Lisbon Municipality's BIP/ZIP competition, to transform an abandoned and waste-filled space into a community urban garden. The project to create, manage and share a community garden in the center of the city of Lisbon, with social, environmental, cultural, and experimental objectives, started in 2021 and is currently in its third year of activity and funding. In fact, the project has managed to win the same funding competition for three years with three different activities: the first year, for the creation of the actual garden; the second year for the creation and management of renewable energy, for energy autonomy; and the third year for a school of agriculture and educational activities with schools. The space, owned by the Lisbon municipality and now under the management of the association, was a small abandoned vacant lot, used as a landfill, filled with debris and remnants from construction sites and old buildings. The project is not limited to activities related to agriculture, but since its conception it has proposed to use the space for cultural activities (festivals, cinema, concerts) and activities related to the world of cooking and food. Education plays a pivotal role, especially in imparting knowledge advocated by seasoned members. This knowledge is shared, learned through experimentation, and importantly, disseminated to all, including children and young adults,



## Regador, Lisbon, 2023

Source: Image of the authors  
Fig. 2

through courses on sustainable agriculture, food and health, culinary skills, and renewable energy. Apart from public funding, the conception, creation, cultivation, and management of the garden are entirely autonomous tasks handled by the association and the community, which convenes every Saturday morning. Participation is open to all and does not incur any costs (Barbedo, 2024; Magalhães, 2023; Madeira, 2021; Figueiredo Costa, 2023; André, 2021).

### **R-Urban, Paris (FR)**

R-Urban is a participatory strategy, conceived by Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée, based on the creation of a series of interconnected and inter-

dependent local hubs, each with its own specific function, but which together form a community-managed local network that can manage flow cycles (production, recycling, waste) and influence various aspects of community life (social, ecological, economic, cultural), with the aim of strengthening the local resilience of neighborhoods. This strategy, conceived as a replicable model, is then implemented in specific local contexts, thus enabling the creation of an international network of the realities created with this strategy. Although initially conceived and coordinated by practitioners and researchers, the aim is that the network can later be managed entirely on a local basis by the communi-

ty. The strategy was first implemented in Colombes, a suburban town near Paris, with the involvement of associations, local communities, and municipalities. One of the three hubs planned for Colombes is *Agrocitè*, conceived as a community farm for urban agriculture. The site chosen for the hub was a large abandoned vacant lot that existed between tall residential buildings in a densely populated area. The *Agrocitè* hub consists of an urban community garden, an area for activities related to agriculture and nature, but also available for cultural events, and a building, designed and constructed with community participation, built to host events for education and dissemination of knowledge and techniques related to agriculture and for experimentation. The project ran from 2011 to 2017 when, due to a change in management, the Municipality decided to sell the land for the construction of a car park, amidst protests from the architects and the community. However, as a strong community had formed around this project, which had participated in the various processes and learned construction and farming techniques, with the help of the population the hub structure was dismantled, transported, and rebuilt on another site. The forced, sudden and unexpected conclusion of the experience prompted the architects and researchers to conduct various experiments to calculate the value produced by the process, socially, economically and ecologically, from some of the benefits of the project, such as: green

space, waste recycling, food production, rain-water harvesting, training in agricultural and construction techniques, and so on (Petcou & Petrescu, 2015, 2020; Petrescu et al., 2021; Petrescu & Petcou, 2023).

### **La Fattoria dei Ragazzi, Firenze (IT)**

In Florence, a series of projects aimed at redeveloping and regenerating peri-urban areas and areas near the river proposed the creation of agricultural areas or multifunctional agricultural parks (Poli, 2016); while a whole series of bottom-up initiatives proposed the redevelopment and management of abandoned and unproductive communal areas, rethinking them as community urban agriculture and managing them as common goods, in fact calling them *Terra Bene Comune*, such as the cases of *Orto del Malcantone* and *Terre di Lastra Bene Comune*. A complete and detailed overview of these initiatives and many others is available thanks to the *3scapes* research, mapping, and platform, which includes both a map and a graph showing the relationships (Perrone et al., 2022). Very recently, in 2023, the Municipality of Florence allocated funds for the redevelopment and reopening of the Fattoria dei Ragazzi, a farmland with an old farmhouse located in the Isoletto district of Florence, with the aim of improving education and outreach on agriculture, raising public awareness on environmental and food sustainability issues, and educating the youngest children on these topics. The



farmhouse, dating back to the nineteenth century, had long been managed by the association *I Nonni della Fattoria*, established following a protest movement to safeguard the land and farmhouse from urban transformations in the 1980s. In 2023, following public investment, the space was redeveloped, enlarged, and reopened to the community, with various events and activities: the space features the farmhouse, with spaces for wine production and old tools and utensils; and the land, with a farm with animals and a collective vegetable garden, managed by the *Ricciorto* association. The association, which started out on a small private plot, is now housed in the space of the farm, where, in addition to activities related to agriculture and the vegetable garden, it carries out activities related to food education, social dinners, workshops on farming and beekeeping techniques, bread production, education on wild plants, acroyoga (Di Maria, 2022; Costanzo, 2023).

### **Mănăştur, Cluj (RO)**

*La Terenuri*, a large area of the Mănăştur neighbourhood in Cluj, had been used since the 1970s as a logistical and material collection site for the construction of the large residential buildings built around it. Mănăştur, before being chosen as the preferred site of urbanization and expansion of the city of Cluj, was an agricultural village. While the entire neighborhood was densely built with high residential buildings, which replaced the low agricultural houses, the *ter-*

*enuri* area continued to be used as a site for storing materials and organizing construction sites until 1989; afterwards, due to the interruption of construction work, it remained essentially a *Terrain Vague*, until today: “a vacant area on the district fringes, informally used by the residents in an individualistic manner, as a playground, a leisure spot or for urban gardening” (Medeşan & Panait, 2016, p.207). Due to the area’s agricultural past, the inhabitants’ habits, and the availability of the large undeveloped space between the buildings, the inhabitants spontaneously and informally started to create community gardens and vegetable gardens, managed entirely by the community (Baibarac-Duignan & Medeşan, 2023; Medeşan & Panait, 2016). Also as a result of the growing pressure of speculation, the risk of investments in the area that would wipe out the undeveloped areas, and with the intention of strengthening the area’s sense of community, around 2012 and 2013, a series of initiatives called *La Terenuri – Common Area* in Mănăştur, part of a larger European project called *Landscape Choreography*, including events, mapping, public space design and temporary activities, always involving the population and in line with the project objectives:

“the project set out to reactivate and enhance the local cultural and urban practices, so as to create contacts between the various groups and communities which use the area and to put forward a methodology whereby its residents can reappropriate even more their proximal space, turn it into a place used in common and defend it together, in case of danger” (Medeşan & Panait, 2016, p. 207).

### Abbey Garden, London (UK)

As reported by Kamvasinou, in London, following the economic crisis in the period between 2008 and 2010, a series of initiatives and activities located in *Terrain Vague* spaces or vacant and abandoned lots began to emerge. These initiatives, which began with a temporary and ephemeral character, aimed at re-evaluating the potential of these spaces, showed an interesting intersection of bottom-up initiatives and state or municipal funding and authorization, and new links between the community and private interests, challenging traditional dichotomies such as temporary and long-term vision, and bottom-up and top-down. Among these initiatives, some included agriculture, such as *Abbey Garden*, a community garden and public space, started around 2008 and still active. The space was a vacant lot, the result of various demolitions and with the ruins of an old monastery, it was polluted because it had been used as a dumping ground over time. In 2008, a local association was created to manage the garden, and funds were allocated to commission two artists to design and create the garden. The garden, created to be temporary but still functioning today, receives regular funding and, in addition to the great merit of having cleaned up and regenerated the polluted area previously classified as derelict land, it is also a public space; therefore, it is always open and accessible to all, and regularly holds gardening activities, agricultural workshops, and markets for the sale of local products (Kamvasinou, 2014; 2018; 2020).

### Results

All the observed initiatives took place in abandoned, unused, and functionless spaces, including derelict land, such as a landfill in the case of Regador. These spaces emerged for various reasons: some were remnants of urbanization processes and plans, left vacant and without specific functions, as seen in the cases of R-Urban and Cluj; others were spaces awaiting future use, resulting from unrealized plans and projects, like Regador, or awaiting change due to shifts in the context or in the management, as in Florence; still others were the result of demolitions, with archaeological heritage, left without future plans following the 2008 crisis as Abbey Garden in London. In all these cases, these *Terrain Vague* spaces, due to their immediate availability, lack of competing uses, and the absence of rental or leasing costs, presented a unique opportunity within the urban context. They enabled the initiation of urban agriculture practices, managed directly by residents at minimal cost, and the exploration of alternative agricultural and management models distinct from private or municipal agricultural plots.

Another commonality across these observed practices is their origin in the direct initiatives and proposals of residents or local associations, who maintained control over both the space and the agricultural activities. In the cases of Regador, Abbey Garden, Fattoria dei Ragazzi, and R-Urban, residents and local associations submitted proposals to local authorities for the re-



habilitation and community management of previously abandoned or neglected spaces. In Cluj, such practices emerged spontaneously and informally among residents immediately after the neighbourhood's construction.

Key aspects shared by all the observed cases include direct management by residents and local associations, a diversity of functions, and the absence of profit-driven goals. These spaces are managed by local groups or associations, open to new members, who oversee the space, organize events, manage resources, and carry out agricultural activities. This management process involves continuous negotiation of individual interests and capacities. Notably, in the cases of R-Urban and Cluj, the initiatives of the residents were supported by architects, urban planners, and other professionals, who aimed

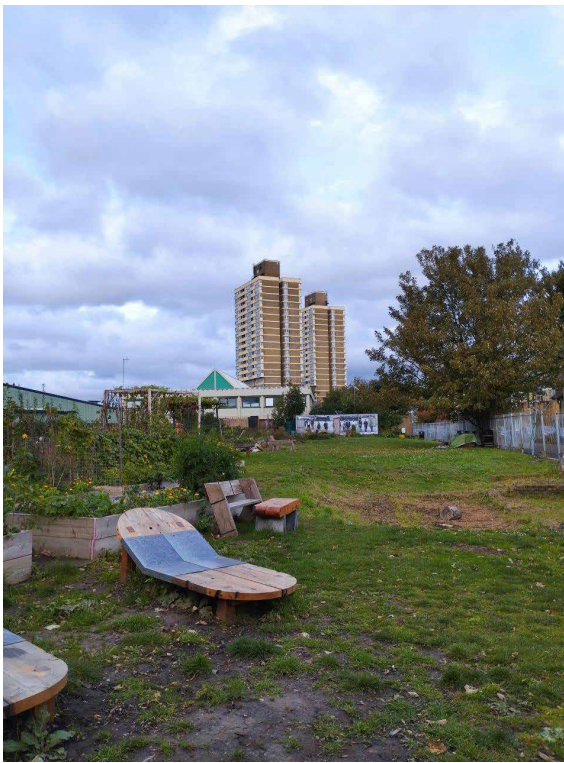
not to impose a project but to offer skills in service of the community.

These practices are not profit-oriented and do not focus on market sales of cultivated products. Instead, urban agriculture in these spaces serves as a vehicle for strengthening community ties, hosting cultural events, workshops, and facilitating the sharing of knowledge. The educational and knowledge-sharing aspects are particularly prominent, with activities designed to enhance both individual and community capacities, such as school tours at Regador, workshops on self-construction and agricultural techniques at R-Urban and Abbey Garden, and workshops and yoga classes at Fattoria dei Ragazzi. Even in projects with public funding, it is important to note that such support is primarily allocated for management costs (e.g., water), ma-

## Abbey Garden, London, 2023

Source: Image of the authors

Fig. 4



terial purchases, or funding workshops and events, rather than providing profit or full compensation for managers and participants. The management of these spaces relies heavily on voluntary work. This aspect is crucial to understanding that the creation, maintenance, and activities in these spaces are not driven by paid employees or salaries, but rather by the everyday care and commitment of those who use, manage, and inhabit these spaces. Urban farming and community gardens require significant care and upkeep, particularly during the summer, and since they are not based on paid labour, they depend on the dedication, willingness, and organization of residents and the community, achieved through continuous self-organization, task redistribution, and ongoing knowledge-sharing and learning.

This reliance on community involvement, which

effectively positions these initiatives as alternatives to the market system, makes it difficult to generalize these practices. They are highly dependent on the people involved, the dynamics of the community, and the strength of local relationships, all of which are subject to change. The most complex and contentious aspect of these practices is the process of formalization and the involvement or support of public institutions. This article examines only those experiences that, while temporary or ephemeral, were formalized through public support. Public institutions and local authorities, though not directly involved in the daily management of these spaces, played a crucial role in the formalization process. This was done through various means: granting and authorizing the temporary or long-term use of public land, encouraging temporary and ephemeral uses for the regeneration of

spaces via new legislative tools (as in London), and providing financial and material support (as in the cases of Regador and R-Urban). However, public support also presents risks, as seen in the case of R-Urban, which was forced to vacate the space due to municipal plans to build a parking lot.

While the formalization of these practices brings certain challenges and risks, it also helps to protect them from the inherent instability of *Terrain Vague* spaces. These spaces, being abandoned and in a state of flux, are particularly vulnerable to rapid changes driven by investments, plans, and projects, which can threaten both the informal and formal practices that have taken root there.

### **Discussion: Towards a definition of Vague Farm**

In an article published in 2006 called “Vague Parks”, Krystallia Kamvasinou collected various landscape architecture projects, designed and implemented in *Terrain Vague* spaces, which included some of the fundamental aspects of these spaces, thereby shifting the approach to designing public urban gardens. With the aim of laying the groundwork for a future, more comprehensive study and systematization of formal projects and practices in *Terrain Vague* spaces, this paper has gathered and observed the selected experiences, which have led to the formulation of the new definition of *Vague Farms*. With this term, we refer to intervention projects

in spaces that were previously *Terrain Vague*, which are primarily based on agriculture but also preserve, maintain, and enhance some of the characteristics of the former *Terrain Vague*, such as diversity, community uses, flexibility, and the absence of market-driven goals. The definition of *Vague Farms* directly emerges from the intersection of observation of the selected experiences, understanding how practices of community urban agriculture and farming can emerge in these spaces, with the theory on the potential of *Terrain Vague* spaces, urban commons, and care practices. By accepting the three points of the previous *Terrain Vague* definition, we can identify these original aspects in the implemented projects: i) Diversity and Continuity; ii) Openness; iii) Unproductiveness and practises of Commoning.

First, the observed experiences are not mono-functional, but instead, they accommodate a variety of functions, practices, and types of activities. While they primarily focus on agriculture and animal farming, they also function as venues for education, social interaction, cultural events, sports, and health activities. This multifaceted approach challenges the monocultural and market-driven urban development paradigm, thereby preserving and integrating the diverse range of activities once present in the *Terrain Vague*. Furthermore, in their farming practices, these projects apply and experiment with different farming and experimental agriculture techniques, other than monocul-

ture, thus experimenting with rotations, coexistence of different plant and animal species, and using spontaneous vegetation, plants that are considered weeds or infesting. Very often, these projects are set up as a continuation or enhancement of already existing agricultural practices, either in that same place in a formal way, or previously practiced by the same people in other places, in a spatial, social and cultural continuity.

Secondly, these spaces do not impose fixed structures or constructions, modifying the space in an irreversible and unambiguous way; on the contrary, linked to the diversity of functions and events, these spaces provide for a high rate of flexibility and openness, to cope with community changes, different types of events or community desires, showing themselves to be extremely resilient spaces. Finally, in none of these projects is the main objective the production of food for sale at the market, for profit or mere money gain. On the contrary, agriculture is conceived as a social and community activity, whose objective is to inform and educate on sustainable practices and agriculture, local food production, and the strengthening of community and neighbourhood social ties and relations. This is reflected in the goals and practices of these spaces, which do not aim to produce, sell or make a profit from the agriculture practices, but rather aim at strengthening social and community practices, sharing and learning knowledge, and developing a sus-

tainable knowledge and vision of agriculture, food and urban life. Furthermore, in these projects the conception, creation and management have a considerable level of bottom-up participation, starting with local communities. In this sense, the *Vague Farms* projects do not impose a top-down strategy, disregarding local potential and especially what happens spontaneously, but on the contrary seem to start from the valorisation and formalisation of already existing spontaneous practices, approaching the approach of *Everyday Urbanism* (Chase et al., 1999). Moreover, the management of the resources, space and people involved, starts from below and is organized directly by communities and citizens, is not for profit or subject to market-driven management, and has always social and educational objectives related to an alternative vision of agriculture, food production and consumption in cities, making these projects managed as *Urban Commons* (Dellenbaugh-Losse et al., 2018) through practices of *Commoning* (Stavrvides, 2016). Finally, the creation and management of these spaces is always bottom-up, with no pre-established and fixed hierarchies, but on the contrary, the management is entrusted entirely to the community and citizens, who organize themselves, make decisions, and manage the space, making these *commoning* practices.

## Conclusions

Over the past twenty years, alongside growing



## Informal farming in Terrain Vague space, Lisbon, 2023

Source: Image of the authors

Fig.5

academic and professional interest from various disciplines in *Terrain Vague* spaces, there has been a noticeable emergence of practices, activities, and formal projects within these spaces that adopt an innovative approach. These projects aim to preserve and enhance certain characteristics of *Terrain Vague* spaces while operating within a formal and structured context, thereby shifting the traditional design conception of these areas.

Although these projects are often published and disseminated, and despite the extensive academic literature on the potential of *Terrain Vague* spaces, there has perhaps been insufficient exploration of the relationship between *Terrain Vague* spaces and urban gardens, as well as the systematization of innovative practices and projects in these areas. This article seeks to

contribute modestly to this direction, offering a draft—a preliminary attempt to analyse and study the strategies needed to lay the groundwork for the systematic study of these spaces. In the future, further research, analysis, and systematization will be necessary to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework.

With this intention, after outlining the fundamental characteristics of *Terrain Vague* and their connection to agriculture, we sought out and collected implemented projects and formal practices within spaces formerly categorized as *Terrain Vague*, selected based on criteria derived from the academic literature on *Terrain Vague* spaces. These initiatives focus on establishing community urban gardens and engaging in agricultural and animal farming practices, while simultaneously retaining certain original charac-



## Regador, Lisbon, 2024

Source: Image of the authors

Fig.6

teristics inherent to *Terrain Vague* spaces. From the intersection of the observation of the selected practices and the theoretical literature on the potential of *Terrain Vague* spaces and *commoning* practices, it has been possible to derive and outline an initial definition of *Vague Farms*. The primary objective was to highlight the emergence of projects and practices that, despite contextual differences as previously discussed, share common characteristics, outlining the characteristics for an initial definition of *Vague Farms*: they establish urban gardens and engage in farming and animal husbandry within abandoned spaces, i.e., *Terrain Vague* areas; they integrate existing local practices, activities, and knowledge; they initiate grassroots initiatives involving community participation in project creation and management; they main-

tain flexibility and host diverse activities, avoiding monocultural approaches; their focus is not on market-driven production or profit, but rather on strengthening community bonds, promoting sustainable farming practices, fostering cultural and social activities, and educating on food culture. Indeed, these projects extend beyond mere food production to encompass a broad range of social, ecological, educational, and cultural impacts. After describing the projects, we endeavoured to propose a definition of *Vague Farms* projects, outlining the transition from *Terrain Vague* to *Vague Farms* by offering an initial definition grounded in the perspectives of everyday urbanism and urban commons theory. Future research should aim to delve deeper into these projects through comparative analysis to explore various contexts, differences,



similarities, and particularly the strategies employed in their implementation and community involvement. Furthermore, a comprehensive and detailed examination of the social and ecological impacts of these projects and practices is crucial to addressing urban challenges and achieving sustainable development goals in the future. We believe that these spaces hold considerable ecological and social value, as extensively documented and debated in academic literature. Through innovative practices that both enhance and preserve this potential—exemplified by the *Vague Farms* discussed in this article, which embody *commoning* practices—these spaces can make a substantial contribution to achieving goals and addressing urban challenges in the future.

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# Opening the gate to bathers' rights

## Commoning process for the coast as a commons

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### Introduction

The contemporary city seems to be increasingly pervaded by experimentations that allow for a rethinking of urban public space, questioning power relations aimed at profit extraction, traditional ownership structures, and their uses. According to Fraser (2022), to counter the tendency of the neoliberal system to extract value through exploitative processes, a collaborative

attitude aimed at experimenting with practices that give space to new forms of spatial and social justice seems to be necessary. Particular reference is made to experiences of spatial commoning emerging in different contexts, sometimes under the radar and latent, sometimes explosively. From this point of view, the commons represent a cultural challenge, even more than a political one, to rethink the relationship between communities and territory.

According to the theories of economist Ostrom, under particular characteristics

*The research fits within the complex framework regarding the relation between commons and care practices in the contemporary city, intercepting the theme in a peculiar context: that of the coasts. These latter can be considered a particular form of public good: the beaches are part of the category of maritime property and are identified as a public good of collective belonging. In recent decades, Italy's failure to conform to the Bolkestein directive (2006/123/EC) and the lack of national indications regarding minimum percentages of free beaches, have generated profound social inequalities. Specifically, the contribution explores the*

*Naples coastline: an interesting field of investigation according to its great difficulty in accessing the sea. These dynamics have led to growing community awareness and the denunciation of a management model that has become increasingly exclusionary. Starting from the experience of the appeal process to the Regional Administrative Court presented by Mare Libero APS for the closure of the gate at the Donn'Anna beach, the contribution reflects on the possible spatial impacts of the committees' movements to regain the right to the sea and the possibility of including the coast in the emerging legal category of commons.*

and conditions, individual rationality can become cooperative and organised communities can effectively regulate the use of the commons for the benefit of the whole community. Given the observation that, over time, both the market and public intervention have contributed to worsening the condition of natural resources, according to Ostrom's thought, there emerges the need to promote an economy based on sharing and to develop ways for organised communities to manage shared goods democratically (Ostrom, 1990). As also pointed

out by Borch & Kornberger (2015), unlike the paradigm (referred to in Hardin and Ostrom's studies) that links commons to natural resources<sup>1</sup>, the urban commons paradigm refers to a context characterised by density and proximity, making possible forms of interactions between individuals. Urban commons are thus inherently relational phenomena resulting from the interaction between objects (that make up the city) and individuals (who live in it), the use of which – unlike the first paradigm in which use reduces value – becomes a productive act that can increase the value of urban sites. Looking further into the matter, the concept of the commons extends its ownership by duplicating the demand for a public service of a social nature, which finds its existence exclusively in the context of a qualitative relationship with individuals, who do not hold the good in question, but are participants in it (Mattei, 2011). As Stavrides (2016) underlines, common space is not fixed but is the outcome of commoning practices and an active form of ever-evolving social relations that question the foundations of property and shape – through the work of those who define the “subject of sharing” (Stavrides, 2016, p. 272) – to a society beyond capitalism. Within this complex issue of urban commons, a link is

recognised between certain goods and the exercise of fundamental rights (Capone, 2021; Rodotà 2018). These rights, viewed in an ecological and collective dimension, require us to care for shared space, moving away from proprietary logic (Capone, 2020).

Care practices, understood as collective and shared activities of public responsibility, are configured as forms of re-appropriation of common spaces, calling for empathy, reciprocity, and participation. As an adjective noun, care indicates a quality of action that brings together rationality and involvement on an emotional level, and has transformative potential, especially for accompanying fragile processes (Marinelli A., 2015). Active citizens who experience these practices and interventions tend to develop capabilities, which are realised precisely in the course of action and through active participation (Arena, 2020).

Placed particularly at the centre of the debate at the time of COVID-19 – which during the pandemic-related closures saw bottom-up practices as an alternative proposal to the political management of the health crisis and an interesting field of investigation for urban studies (Fragno & Tola, 2021; Gabauer et al. 2022) – reflections on care involve a plural repertoire of collective actions for the construction of alternative models from reciprocity relations. Starting from the distinction made by Tronto (2013) between *caring for*, *caring about* and *caring with*, according to the Care Collective (2021) care

is not simply an individual practice but a social capacity to build new practices of democracy and new anti-capitalist social relations. Giving particular relevance to the relational dimension (Poli, 2016), care is a practice that creates social bonds and produces attention to places, not as mere maintenance but as keeping them alive. It is a *collective effort* aimed at improvement in an evolving space that increases their usability and adapts them to the needs of the community (Belingardi, 2015). Collective care practices require accessible public spaces and sharing infrastructure to cultivate common actions, mutual support and participation practices.

In particular, the research fits within this complex framework concerning the relationship between common goods and practices of care in the contemporary city, intercepting the theme in a peculiar context: that of the coast. Specifically, in the Italian debate, the coasts are assuming a growing protagonism concerning the issue of beach concessions, the Bolkestein directive implementation, and the “scarcity” of coastal resources (Coppola, 2023; Guizio, 2022; Palligiano, 2022).

In particular, the contribution reflects on the possible spatial impacts of care practices and committees' movements to regain the right to the sea and the possibility of including the coast in the commons category. If for some authors the territory is a common (Magnaghi, 2012; Maddalena, 2014), then one can hypothesise that the beach can also be considered common

(Lucarelli, 2019). In this perspective, treating the coastline as a common represents the most effective means to concretize fundamental rights. If the coasts, like commons, are assets of collective belonging, then they are off-market, and their management implies participation. Moreover, moving a portion of the maritime state property away from the purely economic approach, avoiding its concession to the private sector, would allow the State to embrace anew its function as 'administrator-manager' of the asset, acting as a promoter of welfare for the benefit of the entire community. Regarding maritime state property, a close connection emerges between its use and the sphere of fundamental rights, including the right to health and the protection of the landscape and environment (Lucarelli, 2019). The management of these state properties can be efficient even if, remaining outside the concession regime (Salomone, 2013), it is delegated directly to communities, including through the involvement of the communities, be they committees, non-profit associations, cooperatives, etc.

Based on these premises, the article is structured as follows. After defining the research methodology, the overall framework is presented within which the theme of the coast is contextualised as an economic and a public good, highlighting the issue of beach concessions and the Bolkestein directive, and the social, economic and environmental consequences of value extraction practices. Second, the article delves in-

to the case study in the city of Naples, focusing on the Donn'Anna beach, describing its main aspects, the actors involved, and the relationship with the theme of care and commons. The investigation of the case study and the processes is strictly related to the author's positioning: the traditional approach whereby the researcher places a certain distance and a position of otherness concerning the practice to observe has been abandoned, to assume, alongside that of the researcher, the role of reflective practitioner and activist. This dual role allowed for the tension of interaction between doing and observing/studying, reflecting in the course of action and becoming operative in practice (Schön, 1993). This continuous oscillation between practice and reflection transformed the case study into an opportunity to adopt an action-research approach (Saija, 2016), also looking at the field as a space for relational and interactive knowledge production (Cognetti, 2016). The nexus of activism and professional research helped to bridge the gap between the researcher and the research subjects, facilitating a more direct engagement with the events and phenomena under study. The case, investigated at the intersection of research and activism, presents the main issues that have emerged, proposing an outlook that goes beyond beach concessions, and opens up alternative management perspectives related to the right of access to the sea. Finally, the concluding reflections of the work and possible future research will be interwoven.

## Methodology

In answering the research question, the methodology was structured to combine theory, social research and qualitative-quantitative investigation of the case study with the possibility of directly accessing the empirical field. The first phase identified the point of observation and theoretical assumptions. Specifically, having the coast as its object, the research refers to an interdisciplinary theoretical framework by invoking fertilisation between different disciplines<sup>2</sup> (Cognetti & Fava, 2019) and what Hirsman (1981) calls *trespassing*. Based on the theoretical framework and the research question, the second phase identifies the coast of Naples as a case study investigated through direct phenomenon exploration, integrating the qualitative and quantitative perspectives. The research used walking along a transect as an exploratory device to observe the land-sea relationship. The direct experience from the sites (for long periods at different times of the year and of the day) made it possible to intercept the transition processes and measure how deep the coast is in terms of different gradients of wetness (da Cunha, 2018). In particular, the dual perspective from the land and the sea, aimed at highlighting all the relationships that the sea establishes with the coast and vice versa, was made possible with a boat or kayak.

Based on this initial investigation, the context of Donn'Anna beach was explored due to its strong connection to the themes of care and commons.

The micro-history of Donn'Anna prompts reflection on the role of citizens in reclaiming denied stretches of coastline and the spatial impact of community work. In recalling participant observation (Ronzon, 2008; Semi, 2010), various investigation tools were used to reconstruct the processes of Donn'Anna, taking advantage of various qualitative data: semi-structured interviews, field notes during participant observation, collection and analysis of press reviews, analysis of the planning tools and legal documents. The case, in a condition at the nexus between research and activism, between involvement and detachment (Elias, 1988), raises reflections on the essential role of communities, movements, committees and associations for coastal management and the restitution of the beach with a view to spatial justice.

During the survey, a revealing step was the meeting with the Comitato Mare Libero, Grattuito e Pulito Napoli and the continuous interaction with some of the committee's referents. This connection also provided the opportunity to participate in various activities, including ordinary moments, meetings, City Councils, gatherings, awareness-raising initiatives, and mobilisations, which greatly enriched the research. This passage is crucial in defining the author's positionality. Initially assuming the role of an external researcher, the author became later actively involved as an activist, allowing one to go beyond the dominant narratives and to learn more deeply about some dynamics, bringing to



the surface conflicts, needs and problems that otherwise could not have been detected.

### **A common never realised**

The beaches are part of the maritime property and, as such, are identified as a public good of collective belonging with high social relevance (Lucarelli et al., 2021). As an asset belonging to the state, they should be directly and freely usable by the community (Girardi, 2021; Ranelletti, 1897). Very often, however, equity of access to the maritime domain is not guaranteed, and concessions to private entities are imposed compared to the available coastal area.

In Italy, the regulatory discipline concerning state concessions is particularly complex due, on the one hand, to the numerous legislative interventions that have followed both at a state and regional level and, on the other hand, to the multiple infringement procedures initiated by the European Commission against Italy. Over the last 20 years, the management of beach concessions has generated an intricate and complex affair, yet unfinished, where everyone seems to have emerged as the loser: the state, the citizens and the owners of the establishments.

Since 2006, Italy has never formally transposed the Bolkestein Directive (2006/123/EC), which regulates competition and provides for systems to assign the management of maritime state property through transparent and impartial selection procedures, to protect the depletion of a scarce resource (such as the beach). This Direc-

tive would make it possible to promote the assignment of these concessions through a competitive principle, preventing the entrenchment of private monopoly positions – typical in Italian coasts – on assets that are highly sensitive from both the environmental and social points of view (Lucarelli, 2019).

In many Italian coastal contexts, the generalised system of extensions of concessions for tourist-recreational use has *de facto* privatised the beach, subtracting it from the free enjoyment of the community, and prevented a rotation of concessionaires (Abbruzzese, 2021). The monopoly regime created by the continuous extensions of beach concessions and their management has generated evident repercussions in terms of accessibility (both material and immaterial), spatial and social justice, depriving communities of their right of access to the sea on the one hand, and creating gaps and inequalities on the other.

There are more and more contexts in which citizens see their right to free enjoyment of the coastline compromised, making evident the conflicts between the economic use of the asset and its collective enjoyment. Even though the coast can be considered a public good (Lucarelli, 2021), in Italy it is mainly managed by private individuals because of the economic function it performs in the seaside tourism sector.

If, on the one hand, the Bolkestein Directive stands as a reference for a correct regulation of competition to protect a scarce resource that

## “Nuje chistu ce’ putimme permettere”<sup>30</sup> (EN: This is all we can afford)

During the summer season in San Giovanni a Teduccio (a district on the eastern periphery of Naples), citizens can enjoy the free beach included in the SIN (Site of National Interest) area ‘Napoli Orientale’, whose sea is polluted by untreated sewage discharges

Source: photo by Klarissa Pica (Naples, August 2023)

Fig. 1

risks being depleted, on the other, it brings out the numerous conflicts between the various stakeholders (Lucarelli, 2019). Specifically, reference is made to the conflicts between the economic use and its collective enjoyment, between the protection of the interests of private concession holders and the protection of the general interest, and between collective use and the individual use of the coast.

Considering that “by the law of nature, these things are common to mankind - the air, running water, the sea, and consequently the shores of the sea” (quoted in Takacs 2008, p. 713), one must recognize the difficult compatibility between collective use and individual and exclusive use of the coastline, which highlights an unresolved tension as well as the lack of instruments capable of managing the different interests insisting on it.

In particular, with the advent of mass seaside tourism, there has been a general change in the value of beaches: from territorial areas of little interest to assets of value extraction, with a gradual loss of the destination for ‘public uses’ that has marked a transition to a new phase characterised by a more evident economic use of the asset itself (Lucchetti, 2022).

In Italy today, the beach has practically become a market good. The coast appears to be a mere commodity for consumption and an asset for value extraction (Formato, 2021). The usability of beaches by all citizens has been compromised over the years by a failure to balance these in-

terests, which has led over time to the reversal of the ‘rule-exception’ relationship. Moreover, the system of automatic extensions, that has characterised Italian coastal management for decades, has created a monopoly regime that, in seeking to preserve the interests of a few, seems to have sacrificed the interests of many, generating profound social inequalities.

The surge in the number of concessions for tourist-recreational use together with the lack of national indications regarding minimum percentages of beaches to be dedicated to free use, has led along the Italian coasts to paradoxical situations in terms of spatial occupation of beaches. According to recent data<sup>3</sup>, concessions for tourist-recreational use have increased by 12.5% in three years and cover about 43% of the surface area of Italy’s sandy coasts, reaching in some regions<sup>4</sup> (such as Campania) percentages of 70% (Legambiente, 2022). In some contexts, there are processes of marginalisation, which tend to move the free access beaches to more peripheral areas far from the places where demand is most concentrated (Fig. 1). In Italy, a complex scenario is now opening up as the Bolkestein directive envisages a radical reversal, posing a fundamental question: how can coastal management respond to the social demand for free use?

While on the one hand, it is necessary to ensure that an appropriate percentage of beaches remains outside the logic of the market for free use by citizens, on the other hand, there is



a need to protect the coastal heritage and its communities. This requires reorganising the procedures for managing state property and assigning concessions, paying attention to the criteria of transparency, free competition, accessibility, and environmental and social sustainability. Consequently, it is appropriate to ask ourselves how we can imagine the planning of a change given the adaptation to the logic of competition that takes on other views. The Bolkestein directive can be seen as a pretext to imagine a new policy for the Italian coasts that can enhance public heritage, placing it at the service of fundamental and social rights. In this context, public policies should focus on re-establishing a balance between the public demand for accessible spaces and the limited resource avail-

ability. This step becomes crucial, especially in those cities where, due to a dynamic similar to Hardin's "tragedy of the commons" (1968), free access to beaches is extremely limited.

This change of perspective places at its focal point the social demand, the public nature of the asset, and the possibility of free enjoyment. From this point of view, the Directive can become an opportunity to rationalise the use of this resource in a responsible manner, capable of combining the interests of the community, and finally envisaging a more socially aware approach. Guaranteeing free access to these goods contributes to reducing inequalities and constitutes – quoting Secchi (2005) – part of the 'spatial capital' of the individuals.

### **The Sea of Parthenope**



Within this framework, the city of Naples is an interesting field of investigation because of its difficult access to the coast. Over the years, the shoreline has undergone several transformations linked to the recurring presence of large brownfields, the morphological condition, the extreme privatisation of some of its parts, and the upgrading of some infrastructure strips. That has led to increasing fragmentation, hindering in most of its segments its direct fruition and sometimes even its mere perception, and taking the coastline away from equal enjoyment by citizens.

In particular, Naples presents itself as a “denied-sea city”<sup>5</sup>, not only because of the presence of numerous anthropic and morphological impediments but also because of the constellation of beach concessions that make the on-

ly existing tracts of beach and not yet banned from bathing for reasons of pollution, practically private and inaccessible. The combination of the dynamics has made accessible parts highly restricted by accustoming citizens to experience the sea through alternative practices.

As will be explored in the following section, the issue of sea usability has been particularly central since June 2022. Primarily, the resolution’s approval on “the open and safe management of public beaches” brought attention to the issue. The deliberation, in fact, for some of those few free stretches of the beach, in particular for Donn’Anna and Monache beach in Posillipo, provided for closed numbers and entrance control by the owners of neighbouring lidos<sup>6</sup>. This solicited a great deal of tension among the citizens, which saw the public character of the coastline

## Cement beach

Santa Lucia, on the most exclusive waterfront of the city, among historic functions, luxury hotels and yacht clubs, many people take advantage of the seaward pavement and breakwaters, improvising a beach in the centre of town.  
Source: photo by Klarissa Pica (Naples, August 2023)

Fig. 2

impaired and triggered numerous mobilizations supported by citizen committees. This context also includes the activities of various associations, which take on the latent demands and needs of the population to make them manifest, consequently revealing the spatial conflict that the use of the beach implies.

In particular, the various events gave rise to numerous mobilisations supported by the Comitato Mare Libero, Gratuito e Pulito Napoli (EN: Free, Costless, Clean Sea Committee Naples), giving rise to a pervasive phenomenon for the right to the sea. The committee, with the support of hundreds of activists, started a path of actions and mobilisations, both claiming and raising awareness, continuously seeking a dialogue with the administration, but, above all, creating recurring meetings to discuss, update, and democratically define the actions to be taken.

A peculiarity of the Comitato Mare Libero, Gratuito e Pulito Napoli is the possibility of being able to count on several realities already rooted in the territory, some of which are linked to the archipelago of Commons addressing Civic and Collective Use in the city<sup>7</sup>. It seems appropriate to remember that the experience of the Commons in Naples matured on the terrain of the social and political demands posed by the ecological protest movement and for public water. Starting from these, a process of claiming those assets (tangible or immaterial) recognized as functional to exercise fundamental rights or

socially relevant needs was initiated (Capone, 2019). These dynamics have led to the reutilization of numerous abandoned spaces through the recognition of spontaneous bottom-up initiatives. Starting from an act of civil disobedience, portions of the self-organising community have (autonomously and from below) created forms of urban regeneration to enhance and bring some disused public spaces back to public use. The Municipality of Naples, acknowledging that the space in which these communities moved was of common interest, recognised their worthy action with the sole aim of protecting these assets. This acknowledgement led to the Municipal Statute modification and the establishment of the Department of Commons (the first case in Italy), introducing the legal category of commons among the founding municipal values. A network of Neapolitan Commons has thus been built<sup>8</sup>, a network of exchange and solidarity of liberated spaces in which forms of self-government and *civic* and collective uses are experimented<sup>9</sup> (Marinelli F., 2015).

It was precisely under this proactive drive and this spirit of activism – which explicitly refers to those social movements that contributed to the recognition of commons in Naples – that the theme of the 'right to the sea' was brought to light, highlighting how its denial generates evident consequences in terms of accessibility and spatial and social justice.

An enriching heterogeneity, which made it possible to go beyond the usual, realising actions



## Community mapping

Source: Author's re-elaboration of the mapping carried out with My Maps during site visits by the committee activists  
Fig.3

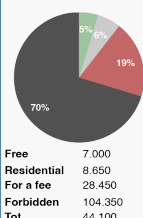
that were as creative as they were effective, both from a political and communicative point of view and in the modes of action and practices implemented: community mapping, canoe raids in concessionary lidos, simulations of beaches in the square with umbrellas and deckchairs, demonstrations, awareness-raising actions, and targeted legal actions. Different modalities aimed at creating communities that look at the coast as a place of collective relations, transforming it from an object into a construct resulting from complex processes, including social ones.

The direct observation of the entire coast allowed intercept: the formal and informal prac-

tices through which citizens reclaim the right to the sea (Fig. 2); the actual percentages and portions of accessible and non-accessible coast (Fig. 3).

The repeated immersion along the city's coast has made it possible to intercept the multiplicity of practices of use that different people make outside of merely functional logic. Traveling from east to west along the coast, without any municipal regulations or services, citizens informally reappropriate the breakwater reefs and possible alternative accesses in response to their own needs (Fig. 2). The construction of precarious DIY accesses with waste materials, the provision of baskets, purchased personally

	BAGNOLI			POSILLIPO			CHIAIA - SAN FERDINANDO			SAN GIOVANNI			
	Place	Sqm	A F	Place	Sqm	A F	Place	Sqm	A F	Place	Sqm	A F	
SANDY SHORELINE	dazio	2.500	a ■	montericotta	500	n ■	sermoneta	1.100	a ■	vigliena	600	s ■	
	villa comunale baanoli	2.300	a ■	trentaremi	1.700	n ■	sant'antonio	3.500	n ■	san giovanni barra	7.300	a ■	
	lido fortuna	7.700	s ■	gaiola san basilio	500	n ■	maapatella	5.800	a ■	industrie	16.500	a ■	
	lido comunale bagnoli	7.500	n ■	colonia san francesco	150	n ■	colonna spezzata	150	a ■	desuperatore	11.500	a ■	
	l'arenile	13.500	a ■	marechiaro	100	s ■				boccaperti	1.200	a ■	
	circolo ilva	1.600	n ■	rocco verdi	200	n ■				pietrarosa	300	a ■	
	coroglio	45.000	s ■	villa rosebery	200	n ■							
	cala badessa	3.200	s ■	riva fiorita	500	n ■							
				cantiere riva fiorita	200	n ■							
				rocca matilde	400	s ■							
				villa lauro	1.300	s ■							
				villa martinelli	300	n ■							
				baia san pietro	500	n ■							
				ai due frati	50	n ■							
				grotta romana	400	n ■							
				monache	3.800	s ■							
				sirena	1.000	n ■							
				baia donn'anna	4.500	s ■							
				via sermoneta	150	n ■							
				circolo relax	150	n ■							
		Tot.	83.300		Tot.	16.600		Tot.	10.550		Tot.	37.400	



**Legend**  
**A: Accessibility** a accessible s semi-accessible n non-accessible  
**F: Fruition** ■ Free ■ Residential ■ For a fee ■ Forbidden

## A seized sea

The table shows a reworked version of data and percentages related to the community mapping on the sandy shoreline category. For each location, the surface area in square metres and the degree of accessibility and usability are indicated. Source: elaboration of the author  
 Fig.4

by bathers, the plastic chair rental service for €1, an improvised volleyball net with wire, and boat transfer services to the tuff cliffs, are just some examples of these spatial practices. These are acts of care and maintenance that respond to the need to regain the sea and allow access to the beach that have resisted the dynamics of logistical transformation or privatisation.

In other words, the use of the coast and the latent needs that determine it, are the subject of collective negotiation and, in this sense, become a political process. In this context, the coast becomes the result of the different forms of social interactions and political dynamics that shape the coastal environment in a way that reflects the aspirations of local populations. In some ways, these actions play an important role because they are a symptom of latent needs that should be formalised in some way – within plans and policies – or they can be the starting point for defining new projects.

Secondly, through the activity of the Comitato Mare Libero, Gratuito e Pulito Napoli, community mapping<sup>10</sup> (Fig. 3) was carried out, to highlight denied access, not only focusing on the issue of beach concessions that occupy, and sometimes monopolise<sup>11</sup>, almost all portions of the beach, but on all types of impediments to public enjoyment of the sea.

The mapping calculated the available square metres for each type of land-sea interaction (e.g. sandy shores, tuffaceous reefs, cemented docks, wooden pilings). For each sampling, it was also indicated whether it was a free, residential, paid, or prohibited area. The data<sup>12</sup> associated with the mapping shows, for example, that only 4.71% of the beaches are freely accessible (Fig. 4).

### La Danse

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the coast of Naples is presented as a succession of

gates, barriers, gratings and walls. That of the Donn'Anna beach is the story of access to the sea denied for over twenty years, of a (re)conquest by an active community, and of a silent immobility of the municipal administration of Naples.

The beach is located in Posillipo. The stretch of coast where the district overlooks is one of the city's most prized resources but one of the least usable, both in terms of orographic features and functional regime. Except for a few cases, the connecting routes between the main district road and the sea (roads, paths, and steps) are mostly private. From 1999 to 10 November 2022, an ordinance of the Port Authority of Naples<sup>13</sup> was in force that established, on an 'experimental basis', the regulation of access to Donn'Anna beach through the placement of a gate, which allowed citizens, during the autumn and winter seasons, to access it and whose opening/closing was entrusted to the concessionaire of the neighbouring bathing lido (Bagno Elena). The manager of Bagno Elena is a private concessionaire which, however, seems to have brought the portion of the free beach back into the logic of private enjoyment, for whose free access by bathers, indeed, it was necessary for some time to ring an intercom and pass under a jetty of the same lido.

Subsequently, starting from COVID-19 to quota attendance and maintaining social distancing, the municipal administration introduced a closed number system to access the beach. In

particular, after booking and passing entry control by a security guard employed by the neighbouring bathing lido, citizens can access the beach. Of the entire sandy stretch, corresponding to approximately 4490 square metres, the one corresponding to the beach, and therefore free of bathing concessions, is approximately 290 square metres.

For many years, ignorance of the ordinance has seen the gate close with the end of the bathing season<sup>14</sup>. In September 2022, through the work of the Comitato Mare Libero, Gratuito e Pulito Napoli, the ordinance became public knowledge allowing citizens to demand that the concessionaire open the gate and recover a de facto right denied for more than two decades. Within days of the opening, another ordinance was passed by the Port Authority<sup>15</sup> ordering the gate to be closed due to hydrological hazards during off-season opening hours. The main consequence of this closure is the appeal to the Regional Administrative Tribunal (TAR) by the Comitato Mare Libero, Gratuito e Pulito Napoli, which was made possible thanks to hundreds of donations and a crowdfunding campaign<sup>16</sup> that made it possible to reach the sum needed to cover legal costs.

On 14 July 2023, the Campania Tar issued a ruling<sup>17</sup> upholding the appeal presented by Mare Libero<sup>18</sup> with Legambiente, annulling the order of the Port Authority president that had ordered the closure of the access gate to Donn'Anna beach. In accepting the appeal, the Campania



un ventennio, l'Autorità portuale il 10 novembre, ovvero pochi giorni dopo la riapertura, emanava una nuova ordinanza, disponendo la definitiva chiusura del cancello evocando generici motivi di rischio idrogeologico. Una sorta di rischio idrogeologico stagionale, per poi scomparire nella stagione balneare.

I cittadini hanno riconquistato nella prima settimana di novembre la spiaggia, il meraviglioso mare d'inverno, per poi vederselo, di lì a poco, negare. La negazione del diritto di accesso è scattata soltanto nel momento in cui i cittadini erano divenuti pienamente consapevoli dei propri diritti.

Insomma, un comportamento a dir poco incoerente da parte dell'Autorità portuale. Io credo che sia arrivato il momento in cui ciascuno si assuma le



## La Danse of Matisse

On Sunday 1 October 2023, the Comitato Mare Libero, Gratuito e Pulito celebrated the entry into force of the ruling of the Regional Administrative Court on the Donn'Anna beach. Source: photo by Riccardo Esposito, Naples October 2023. Text from the article by Alberto Lucarelli entitled "Posillipo, la spiaggia vietata di Donn'Anna" (EN: Posillipo, Donn'Anna's forbidden beach) published in La Repubblica Napoli on 5 December 2022.

Source: reworked by the author

Fig.5

Regional Administrative Court underlined that the Port Authority's decision was based on incorrect assumptions and that the high hydrogeological risk was never supported by evidence during the trial.

After the victory of the appeal was celebrated on the beach (Fig. 5), the Committee of activists continuously monitored the actual opening of the gate, but on 30 October 2023, a new ordinance from the Port Authority established that the gate had to remain closed due to a lack of municipal coastal defence planning<sup>19</sup>. A plan

that should be drawn up by the Municipality, a 'silent accomplice' of this succession of events. This led the Committee to undertake a second appeal to the TAR and to launch a new crowd-funding campaign<sup>20</sup> to cover the legal costs.

On 1 February 2024 – through a new ordinance<sup>21</sup> – the Campania TAR annulled the provision of the Port Authority (of 30 October 2023) which delegated the management of the gate to the lido for reasons of public safety, believing that the appeal was supported by sufficient elements of possible validity. Specifically, the TAR



### The liberated beach.

Following the victory of the appeal to the TAR and the opening of the access gate to the Donn'Anna beach, the citizens have finally regained the sea even in winter.

Sources: on the left photo by K.Pica (Naples, May 2022), on the right photo by Ugo Rossi (Naples, April 2024)

Fig. 6

did not limit itself to suspending the effects of the ordinance, but also to affirm the principle of guaranteeing the accessibility and usability of the coastline to citizens by making the public property-goods relationship prevail, the public goods-rights one<sup>22</sup>. In addition, the TAR has required the competent institutions to find ways, within 20 days, to guarantee free access to the sea and safe use of the beach.

On August 22, 2024, the judges of the seventh section of the Campania TAR issued their ruling on appeal no. 45/2024, filed by Mare Libero against the Port Authority and the Municipality. The ruling<sup>23</sup> restored Donn'Anna beach to the citizens and mandated that the gate be kept open year-round. The Regional Administrative

Court not only annulled and declared the measures issued by the Port Authority unlawful but also ordered it to reimburse court costs as compensation for its unlawful conduct.

### Learning from Donn'Anna

Donn'Anna's experience shows how in the Neapolitan context (but also at a national level) a collective consciousness has now emerged to exercise its rights over public property, intending to recognize the social function of the maritime domain.

This sensitivity has found shape above all in the activities of various associations and committees, also supported by important sentences, carried out to recognize the social function

of maritime state property and of initiating a change of perspective on how beaches are seen today, guaranteeing their access, free use, and minimum public services. What the French sociologist Rosanvallon (2012) calls 'counter-democracy' seems to be emerging, that is, the demand for democratic participation and a radical criticism of the reduction of rights.

While, on the local level, this mobilisation had the merit of reopening the city's debate<sup>24</sup> on the abuse of the sea resource, becoming increasingly exclusionary and functional to private interests, on the other the ruling represents a victory for the principles of legal civilisation that regain their legitimate space<sup>25</sup>. The case also makes the point that establishing a permanent civic observatory on the sea could be a helpful tool for the bottom-up enhancement of the sea resource from a social-ecological, collaborative and participatory perspective.

The reconquest of Donn'Anna beach presents itself as an emblematic case of the affirmation of democracy, defining a new season for the use of maritime state property. Moreover, the recognition of Mare Libero's procedural legitimacy is of fundamental importance, both concerning the statutory objectives it pursues, but also by its territorial rootedness<sup>26</sup>. This recognition could have significant implications, opening up important prospects for other battles at the local level<sup>27</sup>.

In addition, through the TAR order linked to the second appeal<sup>28</sup>, the principle seems to pass ac-

ording to which the obligations of the institutions cannot burden or fall on citizens, limiting their protection of some fundamental rights. A constitutionally oriented reading of the current legislation is confirmed, reversing the current trend and making the rights of the person prevail over a mercantile approach to public goods. The second sentence of the TAR has in some way established the attribution of maritime state property to the category of public goods whose free enjoyment pertains to the protection of human personality and its correct development within the context of the welfare state, and the interpretative need to look at the theme of public goods beyond a purely "patrimonial-proprietary vision to arrive at a personal-collectivist perspective"<sup>29</sup>. In particular, concerning the need to allow the community to use the sea, the assumption that the public administration must be responsible for identifying how the use of the sea can be accessible to the community takes on further regulatory importance. The Donn'Anna beach also proved to be an 'infrastructure of care', through which it was possible to build and strengthen social ties and experiment with practices of resistance and re-appropriation. It has become an opportunity to take care of that stretch of coastline for the citizens who enjoy it or would like to enjoy it, as well as a place where social bonds have been built and, over time, strengthened. The reopening of the access gate to the beach is the symbol of many other closed gates that should be opened and of

private management of resources that should be overcome with a rebalancing of the percentages of free or concession beaches.

The Donn'Anna experience could be identified as an example of support for everyday policies aimed at reconstructing rights and deconstructing some of the inequalities and social gaps when faced with the right of access to the sea. The powerful reverberating effect that the reconquest of the beach has had must be recognised: both from the point of view of raising awareness on the issue of free use of the coast, intercepting, informing, and involving an increasingly large portion of citizens; and from that of the spatial repercussions of a legal-administrative 'burden' through material restitution of stretches of coast to the community.

### Conclusion

In the national context, there emerges the need to 'restore dignity' to the assets of collective belonging, ensuring that a fair percentage remains outside the economic logic, experimenting with other forms of management through the involvement of associations or non-profit organisations; management which, inspired by the Neapolitan formula of Urban and Collective and Civic Use, guarantees free use and access to the coast, overcoming the mechanism of concession and entrustment to a single entity as the exclusive contact person. After all, it was precisely the experience of the Commons in the city of Naples that led to the rediscovery

of civic and collective uses, and to have allowed, thanks to activism and spontaneous financing mechanisms, to reopen and make usable again and free of charge a large real estate asset and some unused spaces, through inclusive and mutualistic practices (Capone, 2019; Caputi & Fava, 2023). Just as Naples has become an example at a national level about commons, why not make it a laboratory in which the coast also becomes common? A laboratory in which some of its features, through management that goes beyond the logic of the market, ensure that the collective good truly responds to social demand?

Returning to the themes raised initially, the paper reflects on the spatial impacts of the committees' movements on these processes and on the possibility of recognizing the coast, because of its usefulness for the benefit of the community, as a common, allowing it to fulfil its social function in terms of usability, that is, restoring to it the nature of an asset of collective belonging. But what does it mean that the coast is a common? In the specific case of the Donn'Anna beach, for example, what could it mean to include that portion of the coastline in the Commons Network?

It was highlighted that an extremely favourable condition for the success of the actions undertaken by the Comitato Mare Libero, Gratuito e Pulito Napoli, is to be found in the possibility of counting on some realities already rooted in the territory, some of which are linked to the archipelago of Commons for Civic Use of the city.

Comitato Mare Libero, Gratuito e Pulito Napoli has proven to be an active catalyst in the process of reclaiming the beach as a common. The regained space can give rise to prefigurations of a different future and different social relationships, highlighting how such actions can simultaneously give shape to habits and acts of sharing, as well as bonds of solidarity (Stavrides, 2016).

While the research underscores that the coast is defined by its use, resulting from both formal and informal practices aimed at reclaiming access to the sea where denied, it also conceptualises the coast as a multi-scalar system of public spaces and a potential catalyst for the endogenous development of local communities. The case study demonstrates the spatial impacts of committee movements in reclaiming the coast as a public space. The committee's work – establishing a broad and resilient social network with growing public consensus – successfully reignited the city debate on these issues and heightened citizen awareness. The work of the Comitato Mare Libero, Gratuito e Pulito Napoli has given rise to spontaneous citizen actions in the form of mobilizations, appeals, data creation and the preparation of open access and shareable information layers and frameworks. The community work has attracted extremely high media response, finding particular interest in national and international newspapers, with interviews with some of the activists and dedicated reports. In the case of Donn'Anna beach,

the community's work led to the reopening of the gate and the return, in socio-spatial terms, of the free portion of the beach to the community as a whole, even during the winter season.

The coast could be a laboratory to experiment with new forms of management, as happened with the civic uses of common. Through mutualism and care practices in which a plurality of subjects, in the form of committees, associations, and free citizens, in a condition of horizontality, forms of contamination could be found to take care of the coast, through another way to govern themselves (Micciarelli, 2014). Looking at the coast as a common presupposes adhering to a new model of participation and active citizenship, entrusting the care of the beach to citizens; the common would therefore be further enhanced also in intangible terms, through the conservation of the cultural fabric and history of the places. Therefore, rethinking the coast as a public space and a common that starts from its community can create a network, and opportunities for socialisation, collaboration, and regeneration.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Indispensable elements characterised by non-excludability (difficulty in excluding potential beneficiaries) and rivalry (use by one person decreases availability to others).

<sup>2</sup> Such as urbanism, urban planning, jurisprudence, and environmental and social sciences

<sup>3</sup> Made available by Sea Portal of the Sistema Informativo del Demanio Marittimo: <https://www.sid.mit.gov.it/login>.

<sup>4</sup> However, an extremely heterogeneous condition exists between the different Italian coastal regions, creating a varied geography also in relation to the available stretches of coastline.

<sup>5</sup> From the title of the author's master's thesis: "The denied-sea city. Towards a climate proof redevelopment of Naples waterfront".

<sup>6</sup> It seems appropriate to point out that this mode was experimented with during the health emergency caused by COVID-19 to ensure beach enjoyment in full compliance with hygienic measures, but it was prolonged even at the end of the pandemic.

<sup>7</sup> For more details see the following site: <https://commonsnapoli.org/>.

<sup>8</sup> Beginning with the case of the Ex Asilo Filangieri (recognized as a common in 2012), the Municipality identified seven other spaces (Giardino Liberato, Lido Pola, Villa Medusa, Scugnizzo Liberato, Ex conservatorio di Santa Fede Liberata, ex Scuola Schipa e ex OPG) managed by citizens and perceived as environments of civic development to promote active citizenship.

<sup>9</sup> Various cultural, artistic and sporting activities are carried out within the spaces: social events, workshops, help desks, self-build workshops, study rooms, concerts, shows and many others.

<sup>10</sup> Please refer to the following link for more information about the interactive map: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1wxkfM5HWaUM-h8e9ZW7YmuX4v3tA0Wk&ll=40.82264860623122%2C14.22272660000012&z=11>

<sup>11</sup> In most cases, the establishments set up gates, barriers, or even 'barbed wires', which prevent citizens from accessing large portions of beaches.

<sup>12</sup> Please refer to the following link for more information about the mapping data and percentages. The table details for each type of land-sea interaction the relative square metres, based on four zones (Bagnoli, Posillipo, Chiaia-San Ferdinando, San Giovanni), highlighting the degree of usability: <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:EU:c84a-7d9b-2994-4982-adc7-393eb-4d6abc2>

<sup>13</sup> n. 6 of 30 July 1999.

<sup>14</sup> The gate was in fact closed with chains and padlocks at the end of September and reopened in May with the start of the bathing season.

<sup>15</sup> n. 83, 10 November 2022.

<sup>16</sup> Please refer to the following link for more information <https://buonacausa.org/cause/mareliberonapoli?fbclid=IwAR-Ovo8G8jj7i999gunrrcR1L07Myvco3DKX3lluwba72Ua5i6yjjy-VwvQLE#>. Y5DP4Hrxd-E.facebook. Last access: 28/11/2023.

<sup>17</sup> VII Sez., n. 4282/2023.

<sup>18</sup> Please refer to the following link for more information: <https://www.marelibero.eu/>

<sup>19</sup> Almost twenty years ago the coastline recovery plan was prepared by the Urban Planning Department of the Municipality of Naples, prescribed by the current landscape plan, an obligation implemented by the general master plan of Naples.

<sup>20</sup> Please refer to the following link for more information: <https://buonacausa.org/cause/donnanna>. Last access 10 March 2024.

<sup>21</sup> 242/2024 of n. 45/2024 appeal.

<sup>22</sup> The TAR particularly underlined how the Administration cannot justify the adoption of a provision which precludes citizens from enjoying a good connected to an interest of constitutional importance.

## References

<sup>23</sup> Which refers to the measure regarding the closure of Donn'Anna Bay during the winter period and the opening of the access gate exclusively during the establishment's period of activity.

<sup>24</sup> Suffice it to say that on 20 March 2024 – during a monothematic session organised by the City Council – a bottom-up motion was presented by the Comitato Mare Libero, Gratuito e Pulito Napoli with the aim of having the administration make serious commitments to return the sea and the beaches of the entire coast to the citizens, in view of the new bathing season.

<sup>25</sup> For more details see the articles by Alberto Lucarelli in *La Repubblica*, Naples "Posillipo, la spiaggia vietata di Donn'Anna" 5 December 2022 or "Bagno Elena quel cancello chiuso" 11 November 2023.

<sup>26</sup> This is also proven by the presence of the Neapolitan collective in the Mare Libero National Coordination.

<sup>27</sup> Reference is made for example to Gaiola and the Monache beach which present similar situations.

<sup>28</sup> no. 242/2024 of appeal no. 45/2024.

<sup>29</sup> From the article by Alberto Lucarelli in *La Repubblica*, Naples "Mare pubblico è caduto il cancello sui diritti", 18 July 2023.

<sup>30</sup> Interview extract with Pino, an 82-year-old pensioner living in San Giovanni a Teduccio.

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# Are the SEZs a place of social and urban conflicts? A look under the perspective of geographical social justice and inclusion

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## Introduction

### The background of SEZs

The focus of discussions about port areas frequently shifts in terms of spatial planning and economic value from local to macro point of view. These regions of the world are subject to increasing investment phenomena and geopolitical conflicts, and the Southern Special Economic Zones “SEZs” areas inside a country that follow different economic policies than the

rest of the country in Italy, emerged recently in 2017, are also subject to the effects of these geopolitical choices on the local context. From a political and governmental point of view, the long-term effects of investments also impact on citizens and territorial development. There is academic and policy evidence that political controversies affecting communities and connections between national and local actors can change the public sphere and put certain parts of port regions and Special Eco-

*In this article the Special Economic Zones “SEZ” are analyzed according to a new social vision linked to conflicts arising from policy problems and other negative phenomena. Port areas are not always the site of economic development but also of lack of growth and increase in social disparities, which occur on different dimensions. The article therefore raises a reflection on what problems can arise at a social and urban level if SEZs are not well built. For the development of SEZs we used the theory of change to identify necessary phases and solutions. The analysis focused on*

### keywords

special economic zones

policies

theory of change

social justice

urban planning

*two fronts, one nationally Italian, and the other foreign. Starting with the most challenging international SEZs, where disputes have been most severe, we question whether the SEZ regulations in place today can prevent disputes and exclusions. Five sectors have been recognized as having more vulnerabilities due to SEZs. We conclude by outlining recommendations for improving the well-being of citizens and addressing social issues that may arise from Special Economic Zones (SEZs).*

conomic Zones (SEZs) at risk (Zeng, 2021; Moberg, 2017). According to research on SEZs from other countries, the main policies on territorial development integrate social and institutional actors and their interconnections within the urban policy environment while also promoting well-being of citizens. These zones are established to encourage foreign investment (Vongpraseuth, 2015) improve economic activity, and increase exports. SEZs provide numerous advantages to businesses, such as tax incentives, streamlined customs procedures, and decreased regulatory requirements. SEZs have been instrumental in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), fostering economic growth, and accelerating in-

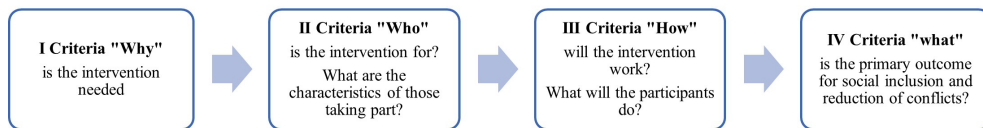
dustrial development across various countries. These zones offer regulatory flexibility, and infrastructural benefits, making them attractive to both domestic and international investors, that when they are not implemented properly, there are both winners and losers (citazioni). SEZs' properly, there are both winners and losers (Arbolino et al., 2022; Moberg, 2017). Mismanagement and poor planning can lead to significant social and economic disparities. Winners might include certain businesses and foreign investors who benefit from tax incentives and infrastructure improvements. In contrast, losers often comprise local communities who may face displacement, environmental degradation, and exclusion from the economic benefits of the SEZs. These outcomes underscore the necessity for careful, inclusive planning and implementation of SEZs to ensure equitable benefits and minimize adverse impacts. Two of the numerous societal repercussions of SEZs formation are labor migration and land

use issues. Local livelihoods have frequently declined because of development of SEZs. The desire of newly established businesses to obtain inexpensive labor from overseas frequently surpasses the need of the local populace for appealing job prospects. For instance, when public property is bought by the government to designate new SEZs, locals may lose access to resources from the common pool and suffer detrimental consequences on their present economic activity. The SEZs is driven by multiple factors (Naeem et al., 2020). The numerous platforms for regional economic cooperation that encourage investment and commerce serve as driving forces. One of the aspects of SEZs in this work is to link the geographical conflicts arising from SEZs in the territorial sphere with the social aspect, considering what happens abroad (China, Southeast of Asia, India, Sri Lanka) and in Italy with focus on territorial policies, there has been much discussion on the concept of spatial justice. The concept of spatial justice has emerged from extensive scholarly discussions on the “social justice of distributions in space,” and has since undergone various theoretical, political, and moral transformations. At its core, spatial justice refers to a deliberate and focused emphasis on the spatial or geographical dimensions of justice and injustice. Therefore, the focal point of spatial justice is how resources are distributed across space and how spatial patterns of living impact, enhance, or constrain people’s opportunities. In recent years there has

been an increase in the use of “global community” projects (also known as “local” or “community revitalization” projects). Unlike port regions, residents in rural and peripheral villages in SEZs generally feel that neglect (regarding comparable services and possibilities) has gone too far, even though they are aware that opportunities and services may differ from those in urban areas. An important factor in reducing rural disadvantages is innovation policy.

### **The SEZs in the world and in Italy**

There are around 3,500 SEZs in the world (World Bank, 2008; Farole, 2011a). Following the example of the main developed countries, emerging economies as Vientman, Kenya, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brazil are considering implementing some of the successful strategies considering the measured adopted by China, one of the first county to implement SEZs, to enhance the ports and adjacent areas. SEZs in China, which have been launched in the ealry the 1978, show an economic growth (Zeng, 2010), particularly in inland and port areas, and are one of most relevant strategic planning that received a robust investment to increase industrialisation. The success of China’s SEZs, particularly in Shenzhen, has served as a model for many other developing nations seeking to replicate this approach to stimulate their economies (Di Ruocco and D’Auria, 2023; Arbolino et al., 2022). However, SEZs in South Italy remain unexplored. Administrators and researchers often struggle to



## ToC steps, source: Early Intervention Foundation

Source: elaboration of authors

Fig. 1

grasp the full implications of SEZs due to limited knowledge of the spatial planning and development processes tied to economic and production systems. Many studies (Sun et al., 2020; SVIMEZ, 2021; Yu and Wan, 2022; Zhen, 2016) focus on social welfare, investment, and economic development through SEZs, but much of the empirical research is retrospective, assessing changes in investment, job creation, exports, and cost-benefit ratios. SEZs, which began in China in the 1980s, showcase substantial economic growth (Zeng, 2010), particularly in inland and port areas. In contrast, Italy's SEZs, especially in the South, have evolved separately lacking a unified approach. Each region launched its own SEZ from 2017 until 2021. In 2024, however, the entire territory of southern Italy was unified as a single SEZ. Unlike international SEZs, Italian SEZs have not focused on specific production sites. Although SEZs have greatly benefited China, Italy's focus on the Mezzogiorno (South Italy) has yet to clearly demonstrate growth and employment opportunities from SEZs. Establishing SEZs is a dynamic process, primarily aiming to revive businesses and improve physical and infrastructural linkages. While international SEZs, such as those in China and Poland, often develop as entire cities, Southern Italy's SEZs are designed as interconnected industrial parks with diverse functions

and values. Previous projects' poor outcomes have shifted focus away from the Mezzogiorno, highlighting the need for a comprehensive understanding of its role and future. Incentives alone are not enough; a clear vision for the Mezzogiorno is crucial (Di Ruocco, 2023a,b; Di Ruocco and D'Auria, 2023).

## Materials and methods

### Scope and aim of research

Weck et al. (2021) state that spatial justice is used as a combined Theory of Change "ToC" scenario tool to examine place-based and long-term interventions, such as the SEZs examined in this study, which are regions cut off from the outside world and where social promotion and economic development do not coexist (Fig. 1).

With the previous analysis on SEZs, this study attempts to explore a particular type of 'common good' such as activities derived from port areas that is relevant to the well-being of individuals and communities, as well as the conflict that arises from innovative community policies as a result of political acts. There are not many national cases from the perspective of urban planning that combine economic development and the sociality of SEZs, so this research seeks to provide an additional general perspective on SEZs, assessing how economic policies, for port

## Theory of Change for Special Economic Zones

**Long-Term Goal** (Zeng, 2021; Farole and Akinci, 2011) The ultimate objective of SEZs is to spur economic growth, create jobs, and improve living standards through increased foreign investment and industrialization.

### *Background for implementation (World Bank Group, 2016; Zeng, 2010)*

<b>Favorable Policy Environment</b>	Creation of business-friendly policies, including tax incentives, simplified regulatory frameworks, and streamlined customs procedures. Establishment of infrastructure to support businesses, such as roads, power, and communication networks.
<b>Attracting Investment</b>	Marketing and promoting SEZs to foreign investors. Ensuring political and economic stability to create a conducive investment climate.
<b>Capacity Building</b>	Training local workforce to meet the needs of industries set up in SEZs. Developing institutions to manage and regulate SEZs effectively.
<b>Infrastructure Development</b>	Building necessary physical infrastructure, including industrial parks, transportation, utilities, and communication networks. Creating housing and social amenities for workers.
<b>Policy Implementation</b>	Enforcing favorable policies and regulations specific to SEZs. Establishing governance structures to oversee the functioning of SEZs.
<b>Investment Promotion</b>	Conducting global roadshows and investment summits. Providing information and support to potential investors about opportunities and benefits in SEZs.
<b>Local Enterprise Development</b>	Encouraging the participation of local businesses and SMEs in SEZ activities. Providing training and resources to local entrepreneurs.

### *Outputs (Mohammed, 2021; World Bank, 2008, 2017; World Bank Group, 2016; Zeng, 2021)*

<b>Increased Foreign Direct and Investment (FDI)</b>	More companies setting up operations within SEZs. Higher inflows of capital into the host country.
<b>Industrial Growth</b>	Establishment of new industries and expansion of existing ones. Diversification of the local economy
<b>Job Creation</b>	Generation of direct employment opportunities within SEZs. Creation of indirect jobs through supply chains and local businesses.
<b>Economic Growth</b>	Increased GDP and economic activity. Enhanced export performance due to the production of goods for international markets.
<b>Improved Living Standards</b>	Higher income levels due to job creation. Better infrastructure and social services in and around SEZs.
<b>Technological Advancement</b>	Transfer of technology and skills from foreign companies to local businesses and workers. Innovation and improvement in industrial processes

### *Conditions for the operation of SEZs (Farole, 2011a;b; Farole and Akinci, 2011)*

<b>Political and Economic Stability</b>	SEZs assume a stable political and economic environment that supports long-term investment.
<b>Effective Implementation</b>	Policies and regulations designed for SEZs are effectively implemented and enforced.
<b>Sustainable Practices</b>	Development within SEZs adheres to sustainable and inclusive practices to prevent negative social and environmental impacts.

### *Challenges and Mitigation (Farole and Akinci, 2011; Moberg, 2017; World Bank, 2023, Zhen, 2016)*

<b>Social and Environmental Impact</b>	Mitigation: Implementing stringent environmental regulations and ensuring community engagement in SEZ planning and development.
<b>Equity and Inclusiveness</b>	Mitigation: Ensuring that benefits of SEZs are shared broadly, including through local enterprise development and fair labor practices.
<b>Governance and Corruption</b>	Mitigation: Establishing transparent governance structures and anti-corruption measures.

# Analysis of main benefits of SEZs under the ToC

Source: elaboration of authors

Tab.1

areas, are a source of stress and social problems. The analysis is applied to the main foreign SEZs, and with a final look at Italian SEZs, a proposal for reflection is proposed for private policies and measures. The study addresses the following questions about SEZs in accordance with the ToC and the recommended approach: "Is the analysis of SEZs under the lens of the ToC criteria from a social point of view beneficial for the states that adopt it?", "What kind of progress and well-being can they bring, and is it possible to fight spatial injustice caused by spatial divergences?"

## Methodology

To apply the four criteria depicted in Fig. 1, we analyzed the Italian SEZs in 2023 before the evolution in the "SEZ Single" or "ZES UNICA" (the single SEZ has been launched on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024) and literature (Di Ruocco and D'Auria, 2023; Di Ruocco, 2023a; D'Auria et al., 2019) as well as the selection of foreign SEZs (China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka). According to the TOC, the paper analyses the ZES following the steps of "who", "how", "why", "what" and tries to explore the connections between the planned changes in programme activities, the actual changes occurring along the way and the overall programme results. The ToC provides a thorough explanation and example of how and why a desired change is anticipated to occur in a specific situation. This technique lays out the actions needed to accomplish long-term ob-

jectives, outlining the prerequisites, tasks, and presumptions that must be met. It is possible to have a better understanding of the SEZs' objectives by applying the Theory of Change to them. The results on the implementation of SEZs according to the ToC are presented in Table 1. The results in Table 1 were taken up and observed through the lens of social justice, social vulnerability and conflicts and they have been grouped into analysis sectors: i) inequality and land-use conflicts, ii) social impacts of SEZs, iii) the legitimacy paradox, iv) rehabilitation and conflicts, v) policies motivated by urban prejudice, iv) lack of values and un-justice of policies. Studies of foreign special economic zones have shown that social problems such as local inequality (Hillesund and Østby, 2023; Hornok and Raeskyesa, 2024), crime, and gender inequality have been caused by periods of economic stagnation. Policies that address social issues and inclusivity must view SEZs as "economic and innovation places" (Farole et al., 2010; Lu, et al., 2019) where production occurs without any consideration of social value within the community, if social challenges of this kind have an impact on development. With the use of the ToC, long-term planning toward goals identified by the literature is made feasible. The paper is structured as follows. In Section 1 there is an introduction to the problem and to SEZs and the methodology. In Section 2 the analysis from the methodology is presented, dividing the results according to the areas of diversity and inclusion, relations

to land use, and the paradox of policies that instead of uniting divide. Section 3 presents the urban policy proposals and recommendations, and finally Section 4 closes with conclusions.

## **Theory of Change**

### **Inequality and land-use conflicts**

The existing literature has highlighted the link between inequality (Peters, 2004; Sekeris, 2011) and the emergence of conflicts due to policies that impact specific territories. Research on the relationship between conflicts and SEZs is scarce. SEZs are significant because of their capacity to draw in foreign capital, boost industrialization, and advance global economic integration. These economic strategies often impact the region in a variety of ways, largely influencing structural evolution, increasing land-use intensity, and land-use efficiency. The boundaries of these zones are frequently set by regulations, which are subject to alteration in response to unforeseen circumstances that alter plans and land usage. Sometimes there's a dramatic increase in land usage coupled with extremely dynamic land alteration, which restricts activities and often changes prospects for locals. As the purpose of this article is to discuss the particular conflicts that SEZs can generate, which as macroeconomic policies influence economic issues differently in different regions. The research suggests that inequality is a major contributing factor to conflict, as political, social,

and economic disparities can undermine social cohesion. Studies on topic (Bedi, 2015; Sampat, 2017; Tejani, 2011) have indicated that poverty and inequality within specific populations are significant contributors to riots, insurrections, and other forms of civil unrest, even though these factors do not always generate social and political upheaval. When large-scale economic policies, such as SEZs, are launched, it is important to consider the possibility that the targeted areas of intervention may result in positive economic outcomes. The laws governing inequality and economic growth have frequently been examined in literature (Cipollina et al., 2018; World bank, 2003; Wegerif and Guereña, 2020). Although the relationship between economic disparity and civil strife is not as clear-cut as is frequently believed, it is nevertheless significant. It is critical to emphasize the significance of different types of inequality as well as the range of ways that societies manage inequality. It is also critical to comprehend the transfer mechanisms that allow an enduring disparity that is generally peaceful to escalate into a violent conflict Cramer (2003). One element that entails changes to the region is the designation of SEZs. Fundamentally, land inequality refers to variations in the amount of land that individuals can access, are entitled to, and have tenure over, as well as in the strength of such rights. Increased commercial pressure on land, particularly in the context of intricate property rights frameworks, may result in land concentration. Socio-political



instability models center on social stability and property rights. They postulate that inequality fuels populism, which in turn causes political and macroeconomic instability and slows down economic progress (Keefer and Knack, 2002). Economic expansion based on SEZs sometimes can lead to urbanization and industrialization of natural environments, risking land management and water resource quality. SEZs affect water availability for agriculture, residential supplies, and environmental quality, potentially increasing water scarcity and emissions, including greenhouse gases, PM10 and Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs). Rapid industrial expansion and tourism outpace the ability to manage solid and hazardous waste, leading to pollution issues in SEZ provinces. Effective solid waste management and removal, including planning waste management facilities and collection stations, is crucial. SEZs also stress forests and agricultural areas, with forest land often allocated for infrastructure development, sometimes without considering community needs or forest conditions. SEZs typically see varied land-use intensity, with many classified as medium-intensity zones where production system land use increases significantly. The establishment of SEZs also brings social challenges, including the displacement of indigenous people, exclusion from economic benefits, and increased social issues like illegal wildlife trade and class distinctions. These challenges arise from inadequate gov-

ernment support, oversight, and improper handling by developers, leading to widespread anxiety over these issues. The SEZs in some Asian countries (as Thailand, Indonesia, etc.) have been sources of significant conflict due to social issues and unpopular policies. These incidents demonstrate that policies like SEZs can provoke strong social unrest and pose problems for citizens. Such conflicts highlight the urgent need to develop structured policies that are socially sustainable, addressing the shortcomings of previous SEZ implementations. The promotion of foreign direct investment (FDI) (Mohammed, 2021) has led to some SEZs taking over originally designed protected land and urban green spaces, which has an impact on the execution of local land-use planning (Thanousorn and Chang, 2015). Chen et al. (2019) and Li et al. (2021) examined the income stream from land development at the SEZ level discovering that the SEZ primarily realized land appreciation through land leasing and sales, as well as by offering basic supporting services. Research on land-use change that is now available examines driving factors, land-use structure evolution, single land-use changes, and spatio-temporal changes in land use. Through the expansion of local economies, the the SEZs' program of Thailand. aims to improve the quality of life for residents of the less developed border regions. Nonetheless, it has been shown that the SEZs acquisition and development process in Thailand is acrimonious, with a range of dis-

agreements emerging between the local community and officials on the SEZs' execution. The SEZ decision-making procedures in Thailand have come under fire for not giving locals enough of an opportunity to participate. It has been argued that this has a negative influence on society and the environment and results in projects that do not meet local needs. In a mixed planned economy, the government can lower the cost of rural resources such as land relative to industrial assets to finance the expansion of the industrial sector. The government can transfer rural resources and savings to subsidise the accumulation of industrial capital, effectively coercing rural communities through land grabbing and reducing their real consumption, like the model adopted in the Russia during during the creation of the first SEZs. At first, the rural economy deteriorates and the urban economy gains through inter-sectoral transfers of capital and land, as well as government policies that favour industry over agriculture in terms of investment, taxation and land prices. The reduction of land acquisition prices for SEZs in India is one such example, like other SEZs in South East of Asia they suffered most from these problems during the creation of the special economic zones.

### **The legitimacy paradox and social Impacts of SEZs**

The Indian government has been attempting to develop SEZs while ignoring the views

and interests of rural populations, particularly throughout the land acquisition process. One major paradox may be that significant stakeholders frequently expose SEZs to various acts that jeopardize the interests of the community in favor of corporate interests. The potential and economic development of the region are at danger due to the widespread societal and political opposition to SEZs. In the case of Italian SEZs, the new regulation on the Single SEZ "ZES Unica" might only benefit a small number of hubs without establishing a network among all parties involved in the South of Italy. Social analyses of SEZs around the world have revealed several issues, including low-cost labor conditions, lack of rights, and population displacement from infrastructure. From the foregoing, the fundamental cause of the unrest was land acquisition rather than the SEZs concept. Undoubtedly, residents of the affected areas have been an important factor in igniting the land acquisition debate and drawing attention to SEZs. In the ensuing confusion, state political groups tried to prevail over each other, but no one seemed to have a clear position on the issue of SEZs. More than any other Indian region, West Bengal has probably seen the most violence and political unrest related to the creation of SEZs. This SEZ debate seems particularly noteworthy when one considers that the 'left' has had almost total control over the state for more than 30 years. The first uprising, it should be noted, was about a Tata project,

not an SEZ; therefore, the SEZ was not the focus of the state debate that erupted immediately after the elections. Moreover, three SEZs had been in operation in West Bengal for years with few noteworthy problems, so SEZs were not a new concept in the state at that time. Until then, there had been little progress in the implementation of SEZ projects because the main opposition parties in the state had not contested the SEZs. Lastly, we need to look at how the people's movement affected the post-election condition of affairs regarding the SEZ's implementation, and the steps taken to drastically alter the political landscape of the state. These nations' SEZs have been hailed as fantastic growth prospects. China and Southeast Asian nations have had rapid export growth, proving that companies and entrepreneurship can guarantee sustained quantum export growth with the correct regulations and lack of meddling. The SEZs policy moved faster than government legislation, largely appealing to capitalists given the investment and employment prospects that awaited. Local government officials have occasionally forced villages to accept low wage rates using forceful measures. The land purchase and resettlement processes have generally lacked transparency and equity, which is against both domestic and international law.

### Rehabilitation and Conflicts

The general consensus is that no one should be permitted to impede social justice in their

own advancement (Miller, 1979). Acquiring the land necessitates a comprehensive package of rehabilitation and restoration. The landowner should be entitled to get reasonable recompense for their land. To promote social justice, cooperation with such landowners in the context of SEZs must also be strategic. The rehabilitation program must involve a continuous income distribution. It's good to see that some promoters have offered families not only a guarantee of occupancy, but also a share of the land's revenue, allowing the landowner to continue receiving benefits for the rest of their lives. According to social research, this type of compensation has fully dissolved families by depleting non-necessary/perishable money, rather than simply disrupting family dynamics. Furthermore, it has expanded the wealth discrepancy amongst family members. Sometimes this has led to criminal activities, so it is crucial to legislate to stop the abuse. The restitution and rehabilitation packages announced by interested states lack credibility because thousands of families have been impacted by previous projects and are still waiting for restitution payments.

### Policies motivated by urban prejudice

During economic growth, the government consistently favors industrialists over farmers due to political clout and mutual gain. Some argue that, while city dwellers and capitalists make up a small proportion of the population in emerg-

ing countries, their impact on government policy is disproportionate to their number. The proletariat is more politically knowledgeable, aggressive, and better organized than the peasantry, therefore this may be attributed to urban living in general. Alternatively, it could be because some dominant groups, such industrialists, bureaucrats, or educated individuals, are mostly urban. Credit, commerce, exchange rates, taxes, and government spending policies that support business or urban regions are examples of urban bias. It is thought that the government promotes or permits the development of a land price disparity that benefits SEZs. The proportionate rise in both public and private consumption, in turn, causes a migration of land from rural to urban areas. As a result, the model suggests an excessive and comparatively high intersectoral movement of capital, labor, and land in metropolitan salaries. At best, the results have not aligned with these purported benefits. SEZs have occasionally assisted in meeting national import and export targets and paid pay to local labor, but overall, they have not been very successful in attracting significant investment, generating revenue for the government, or creating links with the domestic economy. On the other hand, SEZs and the infrastructure that supports them have a detrimental impact on both society and the environment. Land-use conflicts, loss of livelihoods, damage to the environment, and harm are some of these repercussions. The promised jobs for those displaced

by SEZs sometimes do not materialize due to lack of skills or competition from higher paying jobs offered in cities and other nations. Although SEZs carry significant costs to society, these costs are usually downplayed or ignored in favor of externalities.

#### **lack of values and un-justice of policies**

SEZs are regions inside nations that have different economic laws than the rest of the nation in an effort to draw in foreign capital and advance industrialization. SEZs have the ability to promote economic growth and development, but they frequently display serious moral failings and unfair practices that outweigh these advantages. This essay addresses the inequalities and lack of morals that are common in SEZs, emphasizing issues with governance, social dislocation, labor exploitation, environmental damage, and disregard for local needs. The environmental damage that SEZs frequently bring about is one of their most obvious drawbacks. Many SEZs enact loose environmental laws in an effort to attract foreign investment and industrialization more quickly. Businesses are encouraged to engage in activities that can seriously damage the local environment by this regulatory laxity, such as excessive extraction of natural resources, deforestation, and air and water pollution. For example, China's SEZs have seen substantial air and water pollution as a result of industrial activity, which has caused long-term ecological harm as well as a host of

other health issues. Such actions show a lack of commitment to environmental ideals and jeopardize the sustainability of the local environment. Labor exploitation is a significant problem in Special Economic Zones. SEZs frequently provide a business climate with little labor safeguards in order to draw investors. Low pay, long hours, and unfavorable working conditions are commonplace among SEZs workers. Furthermore, it is frequently illegal for employees to organize unions or engage in collective bargaining, which gives them few options for advocating for improved working conditions. When SEZs are established, local communities are frequently forced to relocate. Residents may be evicted as a result of land acquisition for SEZs, usually without just compensation or appropriate relocation preparations. Local livelihoods are negatively impacted by this displacement, especially in agrarian societies where people rely on the land for subsistence.

For instance, in India, the creation of SEZs has frequently been followed with the forcible eviction of locals and farmers, sparking intense opposition and legal disputes. A serious ethical error occurred in the development and execution of SEZ policies as evidenced by the inadequate attention paid to the rights and needs of displaced communities. In addition to immediately harming those who have been displaced, such actions often undermine social cohesiveness and public confidence in political institutions. Economic imbalance between local and inter-

national enterprises as well as inside the host nation can be made worse by SEZs. An unequal distribution of benefits is frequently the outcome of the generous tax cuts and incentives provided to entice multinational firms. The local populace's economic circumstances might not significantly improve while big businesses and affluent investors make significant gains.

The government's capacity to deliver basic public services may be weakened by the decreased tax income brought about by these incentives, which would further entrench inequality. Furthermore, the well-resourced multinational corporations that predominate in SEZs may be too strong for local small and medium-sized firms (SMEs), restricting their potential for expansion and development. While SEZs usually prioritize developing an environment that is appealing to foreign companies, they typically disregard the requirements of the local community. Within SEZs, infrastructure development is usually focused on meeting business needs, with minimal attention given to the social infrastructure that inhabitants demand, such as housing, health-care, and education.

The general standard of living for the local populace may be compromised by this negligence, which could result in subpar living circumstances. The emphasis on social facilities above corporate infrastructure indicates a misalignment of objectives and a disdain for the area's overall growth.

## Results and policies recommendations

### Critical summary results

The SEZs conflicts can be categorized as follows:

- Dispute resolution and access to justice: There are few legal options available to address rights abuses brought on by forced relocation. The majority of SEZs management committees lack a grievance procedure that would enable impacted communities to file complaints and bring attention to abuses of human rights. Alternative avenues for seeking legal recourse are beset by expensive and bureaucratic processes, and political meddling frequently occurs in the courts and mediation organizations. Affected communities turn to a range of unofficial channels in the lack of unbiased institutions to assist in discussions with more powerful and wealthy parties, but these attempts are hindered in situations when public protest and political boundaries restrict opposition;
- Lack of accountability and transparency: in addition to the lack of accountability and transparency surrounding land deals, there is a dearth of publicly accessible data on SEZ projects in the area, including plans for resettlement and compensation, impact assessments, feasibility studies, and approval procedures. SEZ development decisions are made in private, with little input from the general population. In nations

where the government controls the media and information is restricted to the projects' favorable elements, the issue is exacerbated;

- Limited employment of local workers in Special Economic Zones: SEZs have given locals job chances, especially young women who typically work in manual labor positions that pay the least. There is a significant reliance on foreign labor in other SEZs. Since many farming families who have been forced out of SEZs lack the necessary skills for the jobs that are available, it might be challenging for them to find employment there.

If SEZs are to benefit society, they must be formed, maintained, and conserved in a way that protects both the rights and interests of neighboring residents as well as the environment's resources. Considering this, we advocate the following steps for both the public and private sectors. We carried out an analysis of the potential benefits of SEZs to also identify conflicts due to economic and investment inequity. The types of benefits are derived from economic theory, which is the basis for the benefit-cost analysis. The domains, on the other hand, derive from academic and grey literature on the main domains in which SEZs have had an impact. The empty areas are where the benefits observed in foreign SEZs have not yet been perceived in Italian SEZs. The results from the research questions: "Do conflicts pertaining to SEZs also occur in Italy?", "Regarding the ToC, is it possible to accelerate the Southern Italy?" are shown in

Sector	Direct Benefits	Indirect Benefits	Induced benefits	Expected benefits
Economic	<p>Attract, together with investments that by vocation require logistics and transport infrastructures.</p> <p>Export growth in the South, growth in domestic product and employment; towards development on international markets.</p>	<p>Witness the development of new and more dynamic companies</p>	-	<p>Economic Diversification: as SEZs help diversify the economy by fostering the growth of new industries and reducing dependence on traditional sectors</p>
Territorial	<p>Localized Economic Growth: SEZs have the power to boost localized growth and development by energizing the economy in certain areas.</p>	<p>Cross-Border collaboration: SEZs close to borders have the potential to promote cross-border economic collaboration, which in turn promotes regional integration and growth.</p> <p>Policy Innovation and Reform: Regional governments can embrace the policies and regulatory frameworks tried in Special Economic Zones (SEZs), which could result in more extensive economic changes and better governance.</p>	<p>Draw talents and best practices that the surrounding entrepreneurial community can utilize. Improving regional connection and making it easier for people and goods to travel among SEZs can be accomplished through upgraded regional infrastructure, expanded capacity of the upgraded infrastructure, and increased logistics capabilities.</p>	<p>Improve the economic structure of the districts</p>
Social	<p>Community Development: By investing in neighborhood initiatives like parks, schools, and medical centers, SEZs improve the quality of life for their citizens.</p>	<p>Employees in SEZs may acquire new skills as a result of skill development for employment, which will improve their employability and career opportunities.</p>	<p>Increase in employment and sectoral diversification</p> <p>Better life Standards: More jobs and higher pay can raise local residents' standards of life generally, resulting in better housing, healthcare, and educational opportunities.</p> <p>Women's Empowerment: SEZs can offer women work possibilities, fostering economic independence and gender equality.</p>	<p>Extension of economic effects in neighboring areas</p>
Logistics-transportistic	<p>Logistics networks to enhance last-mile delivery and logistics operations</p>	<p>Local supply chains can be strengthened and small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) can expand as a result of SEZs' ability to generate demand for local suppliers and service providers.</p>	-	<p>Push the countries to become one of the great logistics hubs of the international contexts</p>

Table 1. The worst areas are those in which, after analyzing measures and releasing regional and national policies, we have not yet determined possible effects. This outcome highlights the research in the literature and refers to Italian studies on SEZs (Di Ruocco, 2023a, 2023b; Di Ruocco and D'Auria, 2023).

The economic advantages of SEZs must be weighed against their social and environmental drawbacks. Governments can better understand how private investment might meet social needs by conducting an inclusive and transparent assessment of SEZ performance.

In terms of positive social consequences as described in Table 1, one of the most major benefits of SEZs is job creation. By attracting both international and domestic investments, SEZs create employment possibilities for local communities, lowering unemployment rates and providing a stable income for many families. This surge of work not only increases individual economic standing, but also raises the community's general living standards. Higher employment rates raise household incomes, allowing for better access to healthcare, education, and other critical services. Furthermore, SEZs frequently act as hubs for skill development. Workers in these zones are frequently exposed to new technology and techniques, which broadens their skill sets and increases their future employability. This transfer of knowledge and skills can have a knock-on impact, benefiting the regional economy and helping to produce a

more competent and adaptive workforce. SEZs can also have a good impact on community development. Many SEZ programs include investments in local infrastructure including schools, hospitals, and entertainment centers. These enhancements improve the quality of life for local populations by offering improved educational opportunities, healthcare services, and overall living environments. Despite their benefits, SEZs can have severe negative societal consequences. One of the main concerns is social inequality. The economic benefits of SEZs are not always evenly dispersed, and there is a risk that only a small portion of the population—often people who are already quite well-off—will benefit the most. This can worsen existing socioeconomic differences and cause stress in the society. Displacement and resettlement are two more major challenges related with the establishment of SEZs. The creation of these zones frequently necessitates extensive land acquisition, which might result in the displacement of local residents. For individuals who rely on the land for a living, such as farmers and indigenous peoples, displacement can be disastrous. The loss of homes and traditional ways of life can cause economic hardship and social breakdown in impacted communities.

Another potential disadvantage is the exploitation of labor. While SEZs produce jobs, working conditions within these zones can be substandard if labor standards are not carefully followed. Workers in SEZs have faced poor salaries, long



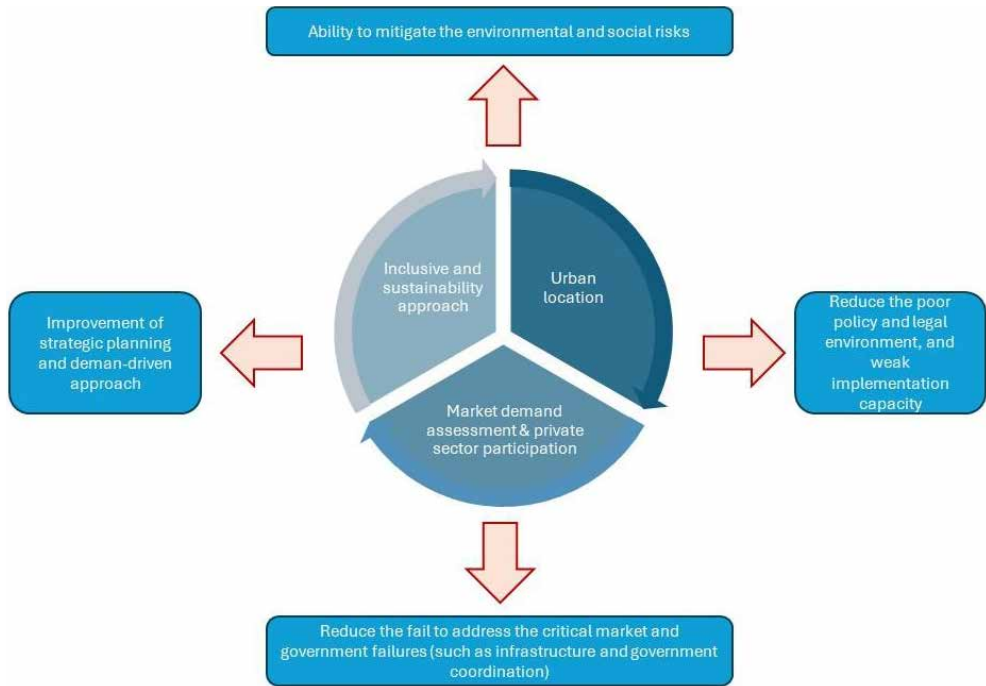
working hours, and unsafe working conditions, resulting in significant social and health implications. To maximize good social consequences while mitigating negative ones, SEZs must be carefully planned and managed. Implementing inclusive policies that guarantee benefits are widely distributed can assist to reduce socioeconomic inequities. Engaging local communities in the planning process can also help to meet their needs and concerns, resulting in more sustainable and equitable development. Strict enforcement of labor regulations is essential to prevent exploitation and ensure safe working conditions. Additionally, incorporating environmental safeguards and promoting sustainable practices within SEZs can help minimize environmental damage and protect public health.

### **Policies recommendation**

As explained in the introduction, one of the aims of the article is to understand the most vulnerable sectors and help identify areas in need of policy and regulatory reform, such as those involving public funding for the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and education and skills. Italian SEZ development plans should be based on a cooperative assessment of local needs and investment objectives to ensure they are appropriate for the region and benefit the local population. Amend the legislation pertaining to special economic zones in conformity with international human rights laws and best practices to protect the rights

and interests of SEZ workers and local populations impacted by SEZ developments. Establish precise roles and duties to guarantee accountability for the effects on human rights. Change land laws to identify and protect land held by communities under customary agreements more accurately.

As quickly as feasible, begin the formal process of returning unused land inside SEZs to the affected communities, and resolve any outstanding issues about compensation with them. Create a fair and effective grievance process to address issues raised by SEZ employees and the communities they affect, both at the national level and by SEZ management groups within specific SEZs. An advisory council made up of villagers, SEZ workers, representatives of civil society organizations, the government, and business sector could be established inside SEZ management bodies to oversee and manage social and environmental issues. The state is required to provide an individual's right to a successful remedy in cases where their human rights are violated. Enforce the law to ensure that SEZs go through comprehensive, inclusive investigations of their social and environmental impacts, including environmental evaluations that are unique to each SEZ. Management plans, as well as environmental and social impact evaluations, must be developed and implemented with significant public participation. Greater transparency should be maintained throughout the planning, decision-making, ex-



## Governance framework

Source: elaboration of author based on the Report of World Bank Group (2021)

Fig.2

ecution, and evaluation phases of SEZ projects. A vital first step is to ensure that the public has access to all information concerning SEZ plans and schedules, including economic predictions, feasibility studies, and impact assessments. Citizens should be able to make queries about SEZs. In the current literature the social-political equity and conflicts in Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are sparsely analysed. Regarding SEZs, as for Italy, this aspect does not occur in the political agenda as in Figure 2 that proposes a way of evaluating SEZs from a social point of view. If the core is inclusiveness, the urban planning and market aspect, the directions to take are to reduce environmental and social risks, re-

duce policy weaknesses, reduce the gaps between supply and demand in the market and improve planning strategies.

### Conclusions and further studies

Establish a process for vetting potential SEZ developers and investors to ensure they adhere to the relevant social and environmental regulations and exclude those with a poor track record. Investors must utilize due diligence methods to ensure they are not complicit in human rights breaches. Private investors can do certain things, such as observe global best practices and all national laws protecting the environment and human rights when acquiring and resettling land.

Make that land surveys have been completed in conjunction with the impacted parties to collaboratively identify, discuss, and resolve concerns regarding overlapping land rights before signing concession agreements for SEZs. After consulting affected groups and the public, decide on the appropriate course of action to prevent, reduce, and mitigate undesirable social and environmental repercussions. Ensure adequate funds is allocated for comprehensive evaluation and consultation processes, as well as for resolving and minimizing the impacts on society and the environment; establish impartial grievance procedures in compliance with the UN report “Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations ‘Protect, Respect and Remedy’ Framework”. These procedures should be able to receive complaints, evaluate them, and provide impacted people solutions. In addition to upward mobility, offer training and opportunity for capacity building to local personnel. Setting and keeping track of goals is crucial for both upward mobility and local employment.

The article raises future research questions about the role of SEZs, questioning whether they can be considered a “common good” and their broader impact on social development. It emphasizes the need for political decision-makers and private investors to understand SEZs’ potential benefits and risks. Key limitations include the necessity for extended analysis periods, individual examination of southern SEZs,

and urban analysis of values. Additionally, Italian SEZs have yet to achieve stability, reflecting ongoing changes and developments. This research proposal aims to investigate the social perspectives of SEZs, focusing on both foreign and Italian SEZs. We propose to the further analysis to explore the evolution of social justice within SEZs and explore how technologies can potentially enhance the quality of life for citizens. Key areas of research include comparing the advantages of private economic growth benefits versus public ones and examining the effects of SEZ sustainability objectives on community measures (Di Ruocco, 2023 a;b;c; D’Auria et al., 2019). The goal is to provide insights that can inform policy decisions and contribute to the overall societal impact of SEZ initiatives.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Single ZES decree: <https://www.programmagoverno.gov.it/it/notizie/zes-unica-a-dottato-il-decreto-attuativo/>

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**lettore**  
readings

## Walter Benjamin Asja Lacis

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Alcuni anni fa, un prete, colpevole di comportamenti immorali, fu portato su un carro in giro per le strade di Napoli. La folla lo seguiva insultandolo. A un certo punto apparve un corteo nuziale. Il prete si alzò, fece il segno della benedizione, e quelli che lo stavano seguendo caddero in ginocchio. Il cattolicesimo, in questa città, riesce a risollevarsi da ogni situazione. Se dovesse scomparire dalla terra, forse l'ultimo luogo non sarebbe Roma, ma Napoli.

In nessun altro luogo questo popolo può vivere così sicuro della sua ricca barbarie, nata dal cuore stesso della grande città, come nel seno della Chiesa. Ha bisogno del cattolicesimo, perché con esso una leggenda, o il ricordo di un martire, legittimano i suoi eccessi. Qui nacque Alfonso de' Liguori, il santo che rese più malleabile la pratica della Chiesa cattolica, seguendo con compe-

tenza le azioni di truffatori e prostitute – di cui scrisse un compendio in tre volumi – per poterle controllare attraverso la confessione con punizioni più severe o più indulgenti. Solo la Chiesa, non la polizia, è all'altezza dell'autogestione della criminalità, della Camorra.

*Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis co-wrote this article, published in the Frankfurter Zeitung in August 1925. The article offers numerous intriguing insights that reflect and refract the contents of the issue. One key notion is “porosity” which encapsulates the complexity of Naples while drawing attention to the gaps—such as doors, windows, and caves—and the spaces in*



*between. Traditional hierarchies and boundaries are disrupted in Naples: the distinctions between sacred and profane (where the Church becomes a place of intimacy), and between public and private: «Come le stanze si ricreano in strada con sedie, fornelli e altari, così, solo in modo più rumoroso, la strada entra nelle stanze». The prioritization of need satisfaction is also inverted:*

*«Se davvero, [...] il diciannovesimo secolo aveva invertito l'ordine naturale, medievale, per le necessità vitali dei poveri, [...] allora qui ci si è sottratti a queste convenzioni».*

*These overturnings leave visitors confused and disoriented, and the traditional visit promoted by the guide doesn't work. They do not know what to see or where to look. The sights and monuments are obscured, while everyday life takes center stage. What do we look at when we observe a city? Can this disorientation serve as a clue about the importance of people and how they use and manipulate spaces when describing a context? Are traditional urban hierarchies still relevant?*

*Yet, the city remains elusive. What is visible needs to be understood, but it is always changing. When the authors describe the impossibility of conveying the construction site and the ruins, they illustrate the passage*

*of time, as well as an openness to new possibilities: «In ogni cosa si preserva uno spazio libero, che è possibile rendere la scena di nuove, imprevedibili circostanze».*

Pertanto, chi è vittima di un crimine non pensa di chiamare la polizia se gli interessa recuperare ciò che ha perso. Attraverso mediatori civili o sacerdotali, o anche da solo, si rivolge a un camorrista. Con lui negozia un riscatto. Da Napoli a Castellammare, lungo le periferie proletarie, si estende il quartier generale della Camorra continentale. Questa criminalità evita i quartieri in cui potrebbe incorrere nella polizia. Si distribuisce tra la città e la periferia. Ciò la rende pericolosa. Il cittadino viaggiatore, che da Roma si fa strada di opera d'arte in opera d'arte come lungo uno steccato, a Napoli si trova a disagio.

Non si sarebbe potuta fare una prova più grottesca di ciò che avvenne con la convocazione di un congresso internazionale di filosofia. Si disolse senza lasciare traccia nel fumo di questa città, mentre la celebrazione del settecentenario dell'Università, a cui doveva fare da prestigiosa corona, si svolgeva tra gli schiamazzi di una festa popolare. Gli invitati, cui erano stati rubati soldi e documenti in un batter d'occhio, si lamentavano presso la segreteria. Ma anche il

banale viaggiatore non se la cava meglio. Nemmeno Baedeker, la famosa guida turistica, riesce a tranquillizzarlo. Qui le chiese non si riescono a trovare, le sculture più pregiate si trovano nel settore del museo momentaneamente chiuso al pubblico, e di fronte alle opere dei pittori locali c'è il monito della parola 'manierismo'.

Nulla è commestibile a eccezione della famosa acqua potabile. La povertà e la miseria sembrano così contagiose come le si immagina da bambini, e la folle paura di essere raggirati è solo una misera razionalizzazione di questo sentimento. Se davvero, come disse Péladan, il diciannovesimo secolo aveva invertito l'ordine naturale, medievale, per le necessità vitali dei poveri, rendendo obbligatori l'abitazione e l'abbigliamento a spese del cibo, allora qui ci si è sottratti a queste convenzioni. Un mendicante giace appoggiato al marciapiede in mezzo alla strada e sventola il suo cappello vuoto come chi dice addio in una stazione. Qui la miseria conduce in basso, come duemila anni fa conduceva alle cripte: ancora oggi il cammino verso le catacombe passa per un 'giardino delle sofferenze' e ancora oggi sono i diseredati a fare da guide al loro interno. L'ingresso all'ospedale di San Gennaro dei poveri è costituito da un complesso di edifici bianchi che si attraversa passando per due cortili. Ai lati della strada si trovano le panchine dei malati. Seguono con lo sguardo chi esce, senza rivelare se si attaccheranno ai suoi vestiti per essere liberati o per soddisfare su di loro desideri inimmaginabili. Nel secondo cortile le uscite delle stanze

sono sbarrate da grate; dietro di esse i mutilati mostrano le loro piaghe e il terrore dei passanti assorti è la loro gioia.

Uno dei vecchi fa da guida e avvicina la lanterna a un frammento di affreschi paleocristiani. Poi pronuncia la parola magica, vecchia di cent'anni: 'Pompei'. Tutto ciò che lo straniero desidera, ammira e paga è 'Pompei'. 'Pompei' rende irresistibile l'imitazione in gesso dei resti del tempio, la catena di lava e la persona miserabile della guida turistica. Questo feticcio è tanto più prodigioso in quanto la maggior parte di quelli che sfama non l'hanno mai visto. Non c'è da stupirsi che la Madonna miracolosa, che troneggia lì, riceva un nuovo, sontuoso santuario. È in questo edificio, non in quello dei Vettii, che Pompei vive per i napoletani. E alla fine, inganno e miseria tornano sempre lì.

Diari di viaggio fantasiosi hanno colorato la città. In realtà, è grigia: un rosso grigiastro o ocra, un bianco grigiastro. E completamente grigia rispetto al cielo e al mare. Questo non è l'ultimo degli aspetti che deludono il visitatore. Chi non coglie le forme, qui ha poco da vedere. La città è rocciosa. Vista dall'alto, dal Castel San Martino, dove non giungono le grida, appare spenta nel crepuscolo, fusa nella pietra. Solo una striscia di costa si distende piana, e dietro di essa le costruzioni si accavallano una sull'altra. Palazzine con sei o sette piani, con scale che si arrampicano dalle fondamenta, appaiono come grattacieli rispetto alle ville. Nel cuore stesso della roccia, dove essa tocca la costa, sono state sca-

vate delle grotte. Come nelle trecentesche immagini degli eremiti, qui e là si scorge una porta nella roccia. Se è aperta, si vede un grande sotterraneo che funge sia da giaciglio che da magazzino. Più avanti, scalini conducono al mare, in taverne di pescatori ricavate in grotte naturali. Deboli luci e musica fioca si diffondono da lì la sera verso l'alto.

Porosa come questa roccia è l'architettura. Costruzioni e attività si fondono in cortili, portici e scale. In ogni cosa si preserva uno spazio libero, che è possibile rendere la scena di nuove, imprevedibili circostanze. Si evita il definitivo, il modellato. Nessuna situazione sembra concepita come permanente, nessuna forma afferma il suo 'così e non altrimenti'. Ecco come nasce qui l'architettura, come sintesi del ritmo comunitario. Civilizzato, privato e ordinato solo nei grandi alberghi e nei magazzini sulle banchine; anarchico, contorto, simile a un villaggio nel centro, in cui solo quarant'anni fa si è iniziato a costruire grandi strade. E solo qui la casa è il nucleo dell'architettura urbana in senso nordico. Al suo interno, invece, è l'isolato, tenuto insieme agli angoli, come da staffe di ferro, dai dipinti murali della Madonna.

Nessuno si orienta con i numeri civici. Negozi, fontane e chiese forniscono i punti di riferimento. E non sempre chiari. Perché la tipica chiesa napoletana non troneggia su una grande piazza, visibile da lontano, con edifici trasversali, coro e cupola. È nascosta, incassata; l'alta cupola è spesso visibile solo da pochi punti, e anche al-

lora non è facile raggiungerla; impossibile isolare la massa della chiesa dagli edifici profani più vicini. Il forestiero passa oltre. La porta poco appariscente, spesso solo una tenda, è un varco segreto per gli iniziati. Un passo li trasporta dal caos dei cortili sporchi alla tranquilla solitudine di una chiesa alta e imbiancata. La vita privata è lo sbocco bizzarro di un'intensa vita pubblica. Perché non è tra le quattro mura domestiche, tra moglie e figli, che si sviluppa, ma nella devozione o nella disperazione. Nelle strade laterali lo sguardo può scivolare giù per scale sporche fino alle bettole dove tre o quattro uomini siedono e bevono, a qualche distanza l'uno dall'altro nascosti dietro le botti che sembrano i pilastri di una chiesa.

In tali angoli è difficile riconoscere le parti dove si sta ancora costruendo e quelle ormai già in rovina. Perché nulla è terminato e concluso. La porosità non si incontra solo con l'indolenza dell'artigiano meridionale, ma soprattutto con la passione per l'improvvisazione. A questa in ogni caso deve essere garantito spazio e opportunità. Gli edifici sono utilizzati come palcoscenico popolare. Sono divisi in un numero infinito di ribalte animate simultaneamente. Balconi, cortili, finestre, porte, scale, tetti sono al tempo stesso palco e scena. Anche l'esistenza più miserabile è sovrana in questa oscura consapevolezza di essere parte di una delle immagini irripetibili della strada napoletana in tutto il suo squallore, di godere dell'ozio della sua povertà e di seguire il grande panorama generale. Un'al-

ta scuola di regia è ciò che si svolge sulle scale. Queste vite, mai completamente rivelate, ma ancor meno chiuse nella scialba scatola delle case nordiche, fuoriescono dalle case pezzo per pezzo, compiono un giro d'angolo e scompaiono, per poi emergere di nuovo.

Anche nei materiali, la decorazione delle strade è strettamente legata a quella dei teatri. La carta svolge il ruolo principale: scacciamosche rossi, blu e gialli, altari di carta lucida colorata sui muri, coccarde di carta attaccate ai pezzi di carne cruda. Poi ci sono le abilità degli artisti di strada. Un uomo è inginocchiato sull'asfalto con una scatola accanto a sé, in una delle strade più animate. Con gessetti colorati disegna sul marciapiede un Cristo con sotto, forse, la testa della Madonna. Nel frattempo, si forma un cerchio di persone, l'artista si alza e, mentre aspetta accanto alla sua opera, per un quarto d'ora, mezz'ora, cadono sparse e rade monete sul corpo, la testa e il busto della sua figura. Quando le raccoglie, la folla si disperde e in pochi attimi il disegno viene calpestato.

Tra queste abilità, non ultima è quella di mangiare i maccheroni con le mani. Lo si mostra ai forestieri a pagamento. Altre cose si pagano secondo un tariffario. I commercianti offrono un prezzo fisso per i mozziconi di sigaretta raccolti dalle fessure dei marciapiedi alla chiusura dei caffè (una volta, si cercavano con le candele schermate). Vengono venduti insieme agli avanzi dei ristoranti, ai teschi di gatto cotti e ai molluschi sulle bancarelle nel quartiere del por-

to. La musica si diffonde: non triste per i cortili, ma radiosa per le strade. Il carro largo, una sorta di xilofono, è decorato con testi di canzoni che si possono acquistare. Uno gira la manovella; l'altro, accanto, si avvicina con il piattino a chiunque si fermi a guardare sognante. Così ogni cosa divertente è mobile: musica, giocattoli, gelati si spargono per le strade.

Questa musica è il residuo delle festività passate e preludio di quelle future. Inarrestabilmente, il giorno di festa pervade ogni giorno feriale. La porosità è la legge inesauribile di questa vita tutta da scoprire. Un granello di domenica è nascosto in ogni giorno della settimana e quanta settimana c'è in questa domenica!

Eppure, nessuna città appassisce più rapidamente di Napoli nelle poche ore di quiete domenicale. È piena di motivi di festa che si sono annidati nelle cose più insignificanti. Quando si abbassano le persiane davanti alla finestra, è come se altrove si alzassero le bandiere. Ragazzi dai colori vivaci pescano in ruscelli blu e guardano verso campanili dipinti di rosso. Alte sopra le strade, si allungano corde per il bucato, con i vestiti che pendono come bandiere in fila. Delicati soli si accendono nei recipienti di vetro con bevande ghiacciate. Giorno e notte, questi chioschi risplendono con i loro pallidi succhi aromatici, che insegnano anche alla lingua cosa sia la porosità. Ma se la politica o il calendario ne offrono occasione, tutto ciò che è nascosto e frammentato si trasforma in una celebrazione rumorosa, che naturalmente culmina con uno spettacolo

pirotecnico sul mare. Nelle sere da luglio a settembre un'unica striscia di fuoco corre lungo la costa tra Napoli e Salerno. A volte sopra Sorrento, a volte sopra Minori o Praiano, ma sempre su Napoli, appaiono sfere di fuoco. Qui il fuoco ha forma e sostanza. È soggetto a mode e artifici. Ogni parrocchia deve superare la festa della vicina con nuovi effetti luminosi.

Tuttavia l'elemento più antico di origine cinese, l'incantesimo meteorologico in forma di razzi che si dispiegano come draghi, è di gran lunga superiore allo sfarzo tellurico: ai soli appiccicati a terra e il crocifisso circondato dal fuoco di Sant'Elmo. Sulla spiaggia, i pini del Giardino Pubblico formano un chiostro. Se si passa sotto di loro durante la notte della festa, la pioggia di fuoco si crea nidi in tutte le loro cime. Ma anche qui non c'è nulla che faccia sognare. Solo i botti conquistano il favore popolare ad ogni apoteosi. A Piedigrotta, la festa principale dei napoletani, questa brama infantile per il frastuono assume un volto selvaggio. Nella notte dell'8 settembre bande composte anche da un centinaio di persone sfilano per le strade. Soffiano in enormi corni, la cui apertura è decorata con maschere grottesche. Con violenza, se non in altra maniera, si viene accerchiati e il lacerante e cupo suono penetra nelle orecchie da innumerevoli tubi. Attività intere si fondano sullo schiamazzo. Il 'Roma' e il 'Corriere di Napoli' si tendono come stecche di gomma dalle bocche degli strilloni. Il loro grido fa parte dei manufatti della città.

Il lavoro autoctono di Napoli, sfiora l'azzardo e si

mantiene legato alla festività. La famosa lista dei sette peccati capitali collocava la superbia a Genova, l'avarizia a Firenze (gli antichi tedeschi avevano un'opinione diversa e chiamavano ciò che oggi si definisce amore greco 'Florenzen'), la lussuria a Venezia, l'ira a Bologna, la gola a Milano, l'invidia a Roma e la pigrizia a Napoli. Il gioco del lotto, travolgente e divorante come in nessun altro posto in Italia, rimane il segno distintivo della vita lavorativa. Ogni sabato alle quattro ci si accalca sul piazzale dell'edificio dove vengono estratti i numeri. Napoli è una delle poche città con una propria lotteria. Con il monte di pietà e il lotto, lo Stato tiene stretto il proletariato in una morsa: ciò che concede con uno, lo riprende con l'altro. La moderata e più liberale ebbrezza dell'azzardo, a cui partecipa tutta la famiglia, sostituisce quella alcolica.

E il mondo degli affari vi si assimila. Un uomo sta all'angolo della strada su un calesse staccato. La gente si accalca intorno a lui. La cassetta è aperta e il venditore ne estrae la sua merce decantandola incessantemente. Ancora prima che si riesca a vederla, è già sparita, avvolta in carta rosa o verde. La tiene alta in mano e in un attimo è venduta per pochi soldi. Con lo stesso gesto misterioso, vende un pezzo dopo l'altro. Sono forse biglietti della lotteria in questo pacchetto? Dolci con una moneta ogni dieci confezioni? Cosa rende la gente così desiderosa e l'uomo così impenetrabile come un prestigiatore? - Vende dentifricio.

Inestimabile per questo comportamento com-

merciale è l'asta. Quando il venditore ambulante comincia presto, alle otto del mattino, a spaccettare la merce con circospezione, come se dovesse lui stesso ancora esaminarla, presentando al suo pubblico ogni pezzo – ombrelli, stoffe per camicie, scialli – si scalda, fa prezzi assurdi e, mentre ripiega con calma il grande pezzo di tessuto da cinquecento lire, riduce il prezzo ad ogni piega fino a offrirlo per cinquanta mentre lo tiene in braccio, piccolo e compatto. Così rimane fedele alle più antiche consuetudini del mercato. Ci sono simpatiche storie sulla giocosa brama di commercio dei napoletani. In una piazza affollata, una donna corpulenta lascia cadere il suo ventaglio. Si guarda intorno impotente; troppo goffa per raccoglierlo da sola. Appare un gentiluomo disposto a compiere il servizio per cinquanta lire. Contrattano e alla fine la signora riottiene il ventaglio per dieci.

Felice disordine nel magazzino delle merci! Qui infatti questo è tutt'uno con la bancarella: veri e propri bazar. Il lungo corridoio è il luogo privilegiato. In una galleria coperta di vetro c'è un negozio di giocattoli (dove si potrebbero acquistare anche profumi e bicchieri da liquore) che potrebbe benissimo esistere in una galleria di fiabe. La strada principale di Napoli, Toledo, funziona proprio come una galleria. È una delle strade più frequentate del mondo. Ai lati di questo stretto corridoio è esposto, sfacciato, grezzo e seducente, tutto ciò che è arrivato al porto. Solo le fiabe conoscono questa lunga linea che si percorre senza guardare né a destra né a sinistra,

se non si vuole cadere preda del diavolo. C'è un grande magazzino, nelle altre città di solito è il ricco e magnetico centro commerciale. Ma qui è privo di fascino, e tutto quel caos di merci su uno spazio ristretto gli è superiore. Attraverso piccole succursali – palle da gioco, saponi, cioccolato – riappare nascosto sotto i piccoli banchi di vendita.

La vita privata è divisa, porosa e discontinua. Ciò che distingue Napoli da tutte le altre grandi città, lo ha in comune con il kraal degli Ottentotti: ogni atteggiamento e attività privata è pervasa dai flussi della vita collettiva. Esistere, per il nordeuropeo l'aspetto più intimo, è qui, come nel kraal degli Ottentotti, una questione collettiva. Così, la casa non è tanto un rifugio in cui le persone si ritirano, quanto una riserva inesauribile da cui esse escono. Non è solo fuori dalle porte che sgorga la vita. Non solo sulla piazza antistante, dove le persone lavorano sedute sulla sedia (perché hanno la capacità di trasformare il loro corpo in tavolo). Gli arredi domestici pendono dalle finestre come piante in vaso. Dai piani più alti, cesti per la posta, la frutta e il cavolo scendono con delle corde dalle finestre.

Come le stanze si ricreano in strada con sedie, fornelli e altari, così, solo in modo più rumoroso, la strada entra nelle stanze. Anche la più povera è piena di candele di cera, santi, mazzi di foto appese alle pareti e reti di ferro, così come la strada è piena di carretti, persone e luci. La miseria ha portato a una dilatazione dei confini che rispecchia la più brillante libertà dello spiri-

to. Sonno e cibo non hanno né un'ora né, spesso, un luogo.

Più povero è il quartiere, più numerose sono le cucine di strada. Chi può, prende dai fornelli all'aperto ciò di cui ha bisogno. Gli stessi piatti hanno sapori diversi a seconda di chi li cucina; non si procede a caso, ma secondo ricette coltivate. Il modo in cui il pesce e la carne si presentano allo sguardo dell'esperto, ammassati nella vetrina della più piccola trattoria, è una sfumatura che va oltre le esigenze degli intenditori. Nel mercato del pesce, questo popolo di marinai ha creato un rifugio di grandiosità olandese. Stelle marine, granchi, polpi provenienti dalle acque del Golfo pullulanti di mostri coprono i banchi e vengono spesso mangiati crudi con un po' di limone. Anche gli animali più banali della terraferma diventano fantastici. Al quarto o quinto piano di queste case popolari si allestiscono mucche. Gli animali non scendono mai in strada, e i loro zoccoli sono cresciuti a tal punto che non possono più stare in piedi.

Come si potrebbe dormire in tali stanze? Ci sono letti, tanti quanti lo spazio può contenerne. Ma anche se sono sei o sette, spesso gli abitanti sono più del doppio. Ecco perché si vedono bambini a tarda notte, a mezzanotte o addirittura alle due, ancora per strada. A mezzogiorno li si ritrova addormentati dietro il bancone di una bottega o su un gradino. Questo sonno, così come quello che uomini e donne recuperano in angoli ombrosi, non è il sonno protetto del nord. Anche qui c'è una permeabilità tra giorno e notte,

rumori e silenzio, luce esterna e oscurità interna, si estende fino ai giocattoli. Sbiadita, con i colori pallidi del Münchner Kindl, la Madonna giace sui muri delle case. Il bambino che tiene davanti a sé come uno scettro, si ritrova altrettanto rigido, fasciato, senza braccia e gambe, come una bambola di legno nei negozi più poveri di Santa Lucia: le facce di questi pezzi si possono adattare a qualsiasi uso. Il Salvatore bizantino tiene ancora lo scettro e la bacchetta magica nei suoi piccoli pugni. Legno grezzo sul retro; dipinta solo la parte anteriore. Abito blu, puntini bianchi, orlo rosso e guance rosse.

Ma il demone della lussuria si è insinuato in alcune di queste bambole, che giacciono nelle vetrine sotto carta da lettere a buon mercato, mollette di legno e pecorelle di latta. Nei quartieri sovraffollati, anche i bambini fanno presto conoscenza con il sesso. Quando il loro numero cresce troppo, muore un padre di famiglia o si ammala la madre, non servono parenti vicini o lontani. Una vicina accoglie il bambino al suo tavolo per un periodo breve o lungo che sia, e così le famiglie si intrecciano in rapporti che possono diventare simili all'adozione.

Veri e propri laboratori di questo grande processo di fusione sono i caffè. La vita non può fermarsi in essi per stagnare. Sono spazi sobri e aperti, simili ai caffè politici del popolo, in contrasto con quelli viennesi, borghesi e letterari. I caffè napoletani sono ristretti. Difficilmente è possibile fermarsi a lungo in essi. Una tazza di caffè espresso bollente - in fatto di bevande cal-

de questa città è ineguagliabile, come nei sorbetti, spumoni e gelati – congela rapidamente il visitatore. I tavoli sono di rame brillante, piccoli e rotondi, e un gruppo di quattro persone esita già sulla soglia e torna indietro. Solo poche persone trovano posto e per poco tempo. Tre rapidi gesti della mano, questa è la loro ordinazione.

Il linguaggio dei gesti è più spiccato che in qualsiasi altro luogo d'Italia. Una conversazione è impenetrabile per qualsiasi forestiero. Orecchie, naso, occhi, petto e ascelle sono posti di segnalazione attivati attraverso le dita. Questa divisione ricorre nel loro erotismo schizzinosamente specializzato. Gesti servizievoli e tocchi impazienti colpiscono lo sguardo dello straniero per la regolarità che esclude il caso. Sì, qui sarebbe perduto, ma il napoletano lo manda via bonariamente. Lo manda qualche chilometro più lontano a Mori. «Vedi Napoli e poi Mori», dice con un vecchio motto. «Vedi Napoli e poi muori», gli ripete il tedesco.

## Note

<sup>1</sup>Benjamin, W., & Lacis, A. (1925). Naples. In *Illuminations*. Titolo originale: Neapel.

Fonte: <https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/benjamin/kurzpros/chap002.html>

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